CHRIS GASCOYNE

A. C. BENSON

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CHRIS GASCOYNE

AN EXPERIMENT IN SOLITUDE

FROM THE DIARIES OF
JOHN TREVOR

BY A. C. BENSON

"The intangible perfection of those whose deal is rather in being than in doing."—W. PATER

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CHRIS GASCOYNE

PART I

(1)

[GRAY'S INN.]

I AM in a great quandary about Chris Gascoyne. He has taken a foolish resolution to try what he calls an experiment in solitude, and holds to it with gentle tenacity; I still nourish a faint hope that we can do something with him —make him see reason, make him feel a fool or a prig, get him to travel, arrange a marriage for him, break his leg—anything to get him to *wait*. But I am afraid he knows his own mind!

As far as I can make out from Lady Jane's confused and mysterious statement, Chris's misbegotten uncle, old Sir Charles, that futile and passionate patriarch, who was always trying to make himself *felt*, has eventually left Chris some money, after having explicitly told him that he would have to make his own way in the world. Why *will* people so constantly tell lies about money, religion, politics—the things the

normal man thinks all-important? I suppose because they are too sacred to tell the truth about! Anyhow, Chris has been hitherto leading a very fairly rational life, and indeed latterly becoming quite a little man with his books and his articles and his lectures, seeing a good many people, always amiable and amusing—that was how he eked out his little income, and earned his dinners, and theatres, and week-end visits, and his bits of shooting and fishing—such a harmless life! Indeed, to give him the credit he deserves, it was something much better than harmless, because he was good and kind and sensible and peaceable, and made other people so wherever he went—or at least made them think they were so, or perhaps even seem to *be* so for the time being, and that is better than nothing! In fact a man can hardly be more usefully employed.

And now this wretched old man has left him money—I imagine five or six hundred a year; and he has suddenly discovered that he has got a vocation, or a mission, or something equally uncomfortable.

I dined with him last night at the Stratford—that frowsy old club of his, where you find the waiter's stud in your soup. We had a very bad, cold, dilatory dinner; and I could see that something was up, he was so mysterious:

I thought he was going to tell me he was engaged to be married to Gladys Holmes after all! But it was worse than that. In the darkest corner of that dark smoking-room, with its funereal looped-up hangings, we sat and smoked cigars that tasted like burnt chocolate, and drank coffee that tasted like infused cigars, and he began beating about the bush. He had been reading Chateaubriand and Obermann and Emerson and Jean Christophe;—heaven knows what he *hadn't* been reading—and said he had been for some time back finding life rather dreary—the road he was following didn't lead anywhere in particular; it was all so complicated, he said, without being in the least interesting; he was always making friends, always finding himself landed in a sort of tepid sentiment, always evoking sympathies which he could not satisfy; the worst feature of the case was that people invariably liked him better at first sight than they did afterwards (that isn't true!); and the long and short of it was that he found he had only been playing with life, and the time had come for him to take a serious line,—stand for Parliament, or become a scoutmaster, or a lay reader, or go about doing good, "searching in the gutter," as Carlyle said, "for fallen figures to wipe and set up." What with the atmosphere and the cigars and the talk I became stupefied

with horror. I begged Chris to tell me the worst and get it over. I said that I was afraid he was going to talk about transvaluating his life, or synthesising it, or something equally unintelligible.

He smiled mournfully at this, and shook his head. No, it was only going to be a great simplification. He felt he was neglecting his literary gifts, cultivating expression rather than inspiration. He had no "vision" he said. I told him he had a remarkably clear eye for his friends' little weaknesses, and that that ought to be enough. "That's just it," he said, "I only see the outside of things." I groaned aloud.

Well, it came out at last. He is going to flee from the wrath to come. He is going to establish himself in the country, and see the evening pomps and the morning glories, and the birth of flowers in the shy woodlands, and the secret coming of the spring in lonely places, and talk with ploughmen in the furrow, and with shepherds on the wolds—all very pretty and fantastic. He certainly can *talk*, and it is curious how he sets one wondering and wishing.

I protested, stormed, argued. I told him he was very useful where he was, and did as much as anyone I knew to make people happy and

sensible—"but do they *deserve* to be made happy?" he said. I got angry at this, and told him that one can make out anything to be futile and useless except manual labour. But he went back to his idea of simplification. "Why," I said, "that's just what you *are* doing, only you don't see it! You keep people together, you make them interested in beautiful things; you bring peace; what more do you want?"

Chris is always so polite and sympathetic that one thinks he is being convinced and becoming reasonable; and all the time he is following his own line. He always has his own way, always carries out his programme, always does just what he likes. He thinks himself weak, but he is tremendously strong, with the strength of water or frost; he seems to yield, yet he holds on; he seems so sensitive, and is incredibly tough. One might as well argue with the tide, or try to persuade a chaffinch to change its song. He is all affection, yet he has never really loved anyone: all perception and insight, yet he has never seen what ultimately does and does not matter. He is as flexible as steel, and he flies stubbornly back when he is released; no one has the slightest influence with him; he is never combative or self-assertive, yet he always gets there first!

It ended by his saying that he wanted me to go down to the Cotswolds with him, and look about for a house—where he can have his "vision" I suppose. It is horrible! I declined with many opprobious epithets. I got as far as using the word "skulk," at which he winced. But he will only write to me next week as if it had been all arranged, and no doubt I shall go. He is irresistible.

I racked my brains for any expedient to prevent his plan, but it is of little use *talking*. The dangerous part is that he really does care about these occupations, if they can be called occupations—he likes things better than people. But it is just having to take trouble with people, and to keep up relations with them, and manage them, and make them reasonable, that keeps him sane. He will turn very sour and morbid without them. I am going to see if I can get Lady Jane to interfere; she depends upon him very much; but I am afraid he may have squared her already; he has a fiendish power of paving the way without apparent diplomacy. I am too busy to do much myself; but I shall make what mischief I can.

(2)

[Gray's Inn.]

I think my first view of the situation was rather unfair. I was vexed with Chris, and thought him unreasonable and even affected. I think one tends to be annoyed with one's friends when they take what seems to be a sudden resolution. It is not a sudden one to *them*, as a rule—it is only the bursting into flower of a vague growth of thought; and I suppose one is jealous at not having been previously consulted. I feel that I could have nipped in the bud, at an early stage, what I still think is a ridiculous project; but the penalty one pays for being caustic and critical and summary is that one is *not* consulted. It is such a temptation to appear prompt and decisive, but it generally means that one overlooks the real factors in the background. I say "caustic and critical," which is a dignified name for being unsympathetic and disagreeable. And I think what makes me angry about not having been taken into Chris's confidence is that I know I have only myself to blame. The people who are

consulted are the generous, large-minded, good-natured people, not the pert and epigrammatic ones.

I happened to go in yesterday to see Lady Northover. What a barbarous and uncivilised practice *calling* is; there's a dreadful fortuitousness about it all—the turning up of incongruous people whom nobody wants to see; it is as absurd as if one went out to lunch, and drew packets of food blindfold out of a bag, and were compelled to eat whatever one drew. It is the introducing of chance into a process that ought to be a selection. I suppose a real gambler like Lady N. enjoys the uncertainty; and, of course, commonplace people just like the stir and movement of it, and the "din of doubtful talk."

Yesterday it was really a dreadful affair. When I got there I found Lady N. alone, like a rather benevolent witch who had just alighted from a broomstick. She at all events is good fun—she shows no mercy. We turned our minds largely and freely upon some of our friends, and she did some very minute scalpel-work with that sharp two-edged tongue of hers. Then Northover drifted in, with that disconcerting air of wishing he were anywhere else. Then an elderly lady whom I didn't know, who seemed to have something on her mind. Then a young

man who is, I suppose, one of Lady N.'s protégés, with a lot of curly hair, and a pleasant, lazy-drawling voice; but he turned out to be a musician, and musicians can't talk about anything but music, and seldom intelligibly about that. He was particularly distracting, because he burst into song at intervals, in the middle of the talk, and made curious motions with his flexible hands, as if he were executing a pizzicato passage on a violin. But I approved of him, because, at all events, he had a definite reason for existing. Then there arrived a sturdy sunburnt young woman, whose name I didn't catch, who simply sat there, consuming macaroons, and turning her face slowly in the direction of each speaker, but spoke never a word. A more paltry entertainment for what Carlyle calls the "solacement" of mortals could hardly have been devised. And then who should walk in but Chris himself; why, I can't conceive! And of course he pulled the whole thing together in two minutes. How does he do it? He said something which made Northover chuckle, and everybody suddenly began to act an animated part. The elderly lady forgot her troubles, and the sunburnt girl became aware of her own existence. The young man ceased to sing and play, and joined briskly in the argument—and yet it was about some idiotic subject like the

duty of paying compliments, about which everyone suddenly found they had views, and combative views. I myself ended by admiring Chris more than ever; he seemed so interested in developing everyone else's ideas, and only used his own as a sort of lever. He told an excellent tale—at least it seemed likely to be an excellent one, only the rueful old lady said it was a very amusing story about three sentences before the point came; and Chris dropped the rest of it, shifted his ground, and didn't even say, as most narrators would, "You must allow me to tell you the sequel,"—but by that time everyone was so much interested in developing his or her own views, and feeling them to be full of important points which had been overlooked, that none of us ever asked him to finish the anecdote. And then, exactly at the right moment, when everyone had finished their expositions, Chris rose briskly and went away decisively, and I followed him; leaving the squatters to peevish and stagnant dullness.

When we got into the street, "There!" said Chris, "that is the sort of thing that you want me to go on doing, I suppose?" I said feebly that if I could play the game as well, I should enjoy playing it. And then I began to apologise clumsily for having been so stupid on Thursday, when we had our talk. "Stupid?" said Chris.

"You know quite well you are never stupid! Indeed you gave me a lot to think about. My plan had seemed to me just a matter of my own choice, and you showed me it was a much more complicated affair!" He went on to say that he now saw, as he had not previously seen, that he had got a definite little place in the world, and that one had no business to break up a social combination, unless one were sure that the change was going to produce something better. He added that he honestly thought he had done his share up here; but that he felt it to be all a very sloppy business, which did not aim at anything in particular except passing the time. He asked me what, after all, was the point of the gruesome farce we had been enacting that afternoon? It had just ended in a few entirely idle and useless people believing for half an hour that they were interested in something in which they were not really in the least interested. "These people," he said, "claim the right of sitting in comfortable chairs, and being fed with life in spoonfuls. It doesn't make them live—it just results in drugging or intoxicating them with pleasant stupors or rosy visions." And then he said that he thought he had a certain gift of expression, and that it was all being wasted or rotted by being made up as tabloids. "What I need," he said, "is to be

alone, living a healthy life in the country, seeing beautiful and simple things, resolutely interrogating my own mind to see if it really contains anything; and thinking in solitude, perhaps even thinking aloud; at any rate the experiment is worth trying; and at the worst I shall only have been opened and found to be empty; and I had rather that this should happen in seclusion, than with half a dozen idle persons standing round, giggling and nudging each other."

He spoke with a good deal of warmth, and all I could say was, that (1) he was already doing a very definite thing, and doing it well, and (2) that without the stimulus of action or talk, he might only find himself melancholy and distracted; to which he said that on the whole he would rather starve in a hovel than fatten in a casino.

I asked him what exactly he was going to *do*, and he said that it sounded rather solemn to say he wanted to read and reflect—but that they were the simplest words to express his meaning. He added that I need not be afraid that he would put an end to himself, or make a silly marriage, or take to drink; that he had no inclinations in those directions, and if he felt them coming on he would tell me. So I said that though I thought there was a big blunder somewhere, I would take a fortnight off—I have

some leave owing—go down to the Cotswolds with him, look about for a house, and generally attend him to the scaffold—so that's as far as we have got at present.

(3)

[Gray's Inn.]

Lady Jane wrote me a mysterious note yesterday, involved in infinite circumlocution and qualification, asking me to come and see her, and "talk out" this "dreadful event." The phrase alone filled me with alarm. Jane always "talks *about*" a thing, when someone has asked her to do something and she doesn't mean to; she "talks *over*" a thing when she ought to do something and doesn't want to; she "talks *out*" a thing when she means you to do something.

She was wearing her lace mantilla; the room was slightly darkened; she shook hands in silence, swayed gently to and fro, turned up her eyes, raised her hands, and said nothing till tea arrived. Then when we were alone, she said in her most veiled tones, "You know, of course?" "Not very much," I said, "but I gather it is about Chris?" "Chris . . . s . . . s . . . s," she said, prolonging the "s" indefinitely, and then—"We must save him—we must save him from this lamentable piece of good fortune. . . .

You will know how!" "The only thing that occurs to me on the spot," I said, "is to persuade him to make a wild-cat investment and lose all his money—and even so I should have to make up the loss out of my own pocket, and we shouldn't be much forwarder." "Jack," said Lady Jane severely, "don't trifle with the situation! Of course we can't take away his money—it's his life we want, not his money," —and she laughed mysteriously—she is at the mercy of phrases. "If you will tell me exactly what has happened," I said, "I will do my best. I know all about the money, of course—Chris told me the details; he has an excellent head for business, you know!" Jane shook her head and closed her eyes at this. "He values money only for its opportunities," she said. "You are never quite fair to him, Jack." "Well, we won't discuss that," I said. "But it is no good beating about the bush—won't you tell me the story in your own way?" "I shall have to go very far back," said Jane, with an air of infinite enjoyment. She is never happier than when she is analysing events into their elements, and it is a lengthy process! "You see," she went on, "you were not one of the prime movers in our little circle; you were brought in by Chris—he said we wanted some hard-headed influence to stabilise the tone. I

don't say he wasn't right. We had drawn together originally in quite an informal way. We used to have little readings—Dante and Meredith and Browning—the sort of writers that can't be just *felt*, you know, but must be *viewed* from different angles . . . and that want a little ventilating—' just to prevent them from getting stuffy," Chris used to say—and so we always had to be *representative* in our choice of people to join us. And at last Chris felt that we were getting a little overweighted with imaginative people.

" Of course we always knew that we mustn't be like the people they called ' the Souls '—*they* thought too much about worldly position, and there was a flippant tone about them, as if ' fun ' were the final and concluding thing you hoped to extract from life, instead of its being just the first encouraging little ripple on the edge—that was one of Chris's sayings, but I haven't got it quite right. We determined to avoid all that, and we intended to include all kinds of people in our little group, anyone with a fresh outlook and a vivid mind. We weren't to be taken in by what might seem vulgar—vulgarity, Chris said, was often only a kind of heedless strength. But it was strange, after all, that we generally *did* contrive to get the better kind of people.

"Then we broadened and brightened very much—broadened and brightened, that was just it—and quite a light tone sprang up. Indeed, I believe we were often confused with the Souls, which was perhaps natural enough—we couldn't be at the trouble of *explaining*!

"Now, Jack, I know, and you know—and perhaps Gladys suspects—that all this has been really Chris's doing. I have often said to myself, '"Chris's Souls,"—that's what we are!' None of the rest have ever realised it.

"So of course it comes as a dreadful shock to me when I gather that Chris wants to get away from it all; and I can't make out why—whether he is vexed at anything, or doesn't like the tone of our little group now, or whether he is simply bored, or whether he has got something else in his mind?" She stopped and looked wistfully at me.

"Go on, go on!" I said. "This is very interesting!"

"I ought to say that in the early days," Jane went on, "before you came in, when we were still very serious, Adeline Graves was really the leading spirit of it all. I expect you hardly know her? She has quite given us up; but I used to know her well in old days, and she had many queer ideas—mystical—I never feel quite sure what that means—and high-minded, and

quite intensely in earnest; she had some idea of regenerating society, and used to say that it could only be done from within by leavening it; and that if groups of people could live reverently and beautifully *in* the world, and yet not *of* the world, there would be an inrush of the spirit which was always waiting for any opening to flow into—the silent speeding tide, she called it. And when Chris came in, she made great friends with him at first; but as the tone became more *mondain*, she mistrusted it. Chris used to say that you couldn't leaven the world unless you were really *in* it, any more than yeast in one basin could leaven dough in another; and gradually Adeline dropped out. But now it seems Chris has been consulting her—I had a long talk with her about it, but I have only a very confused idea of what happened. I find Adeline always rather confusing. She has a way of talking as if one had left the room, and as if she were making up what she would like to have said. Anyhow, he *did* ask her advice; and she seems to have told him that it was no good breaking his heart over trying to raise the tone, and that he was only losing his own aspirations without communicating them to anyone else, and that we were just pleasing ourselves, and enjoying life, and pretending all the time to be doing it for high motives. And then she advised

him to lead a different sort of life, and just wait until an open door was set before him.

"Adeline can be very impressive when she chooses—I don't mean that she poses—I am sure she is perfectly honest; but she is rather dramatic and prophetic."

"But was Chris taken in by this?" I said. "That doesn't seem to me likely."

"He didn't want much persuading," said Jane, "but it is always impressive to be told what one might do, especially when one has suggested it oneself. I often feel that with my doctor!"

"It sounds like something out of the Middle Ages!" I said.

"Yes," said Jane, "there is something rather fourteenth-century about Adeline! She said to me once that she could never read the papers, because we were surely never intended to know so much about the world."

"But," I said, "Chris isn't like that; he is a specimen of the highest product of the Victorian era, both in his faults and virtues. He hates the democracy so much that he feels bound to educate it. He is as subtle as Browning and as pathetic as Ruskin. He is modern to the finger-tips; he would be as happy in the fourteenth century as a Persian cat in a pigsty."

"Well, there it is, anyhow," said Jane, "and it's a fine mess! But what I can't *bear* is that Chris should seem so heartless about it. He seems to have no affection for human beings as human beings, only a strong sense of some duty towards them; he doesn't like them enough even to hurt them; he can't hate, and you can't love without hate. But it isn't much use talking—what can we do?"

"We can't do anything," I said. "The cage is open and the bird is flown!"

(4)

[Gray's Inn.]

The plot thickens. Chris is behaving most characteristically. Just when one most wants to see him and hear about him, and when too, all day long, the most beautiful considerations and forcible arguments keep on occurring to one as to why he should *not* go off into the desert, he effaces himself, and only groans underground like Hamlet's ghost. What is he doing? Is he spending his days in prayer and fasting? He has been to see me once, when he *must* have known I should be at the office. Once I saw him afar off at a concert, and he looked not as if he were pondering over an anxious decision, but full of secret mirth and pleasant anticipations. What can be done with anyone in *that* frame of mind? It is like a figure in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, dancing down a by-path to the little door in the side of the hill, with the smoke oozing out of the crannies, and the smothered sounds within. . . .

I was just writing this when the culprit came to see me; and things are worse than ever. He

is *exalté*; he testifies, like Jonah sitting at ease under the gourd, gloating over Nineveh. He has a case against the world. He says there is too much eating and drinking, too much talking and music, too many Delilahs. It was in vain that I told him that Delilah was a most respectable girl, daughter of a neighbouring country gentleman. He brushed the interruption aside with a fine gesture. He is out, it seems, for the new happiness. I reminded him of Carlyle's "eternal yesterday." He asked what I meant, with all the injured dignity of ignorance. I explained that he was in no sense *free*—that he was the creature of habit, his own habits, his friends' habits, his ancestors' habits, and that he couldn't break with it all in this summary way. He said that the sort of life he was living was becoming both loathsome and ridiculous to him—always making arrangements to live and never living. I said he wanted not a flight, but a new profession—I advised him to marry. All he said was, "*Women!*"

He told me he had seen Lady Jane again. He *doesn't* tell me that he has been consecrated, so to speak, by Adeline Graves, while I daren't split on Jane; that great woman has failed us; we ought to have secured her. I suppose he must have hypnotised her; there is a particular look of his when he gazes at one in a careless,

youthful, direct sort of way, with those big brown eyes of his wide open, expecting submission or concurrence. It makes even me, a hardened sinner, anxious to justify myself, anxious to regain his favour. I feel like Falstaff, that I am bewitched, that I have drunk medicines.

"What monstrous story did you tell her?" I said to Chris.

"I just told her the truth."

"I don't know what you mean by the truth," I said. "You are as bad as the man who says to you, 'Either the Bible is true or it isn't."

"Well then, I told her what I mean to do."

"That's a very different thing," I said.

"Ah, but I gave her my reasons."

No doubt he explained that he had experienced conversion, and that he must be renewed and purified. You can imagine the sort of thing he would say. And Lady Jane, it seems, had become oracular; she always does when she does not know what to suggest. She told him (so he says) that there was *no* reason against his going; that what he needed was to suffer, and that it would make him suffer. Some sentence, I suppose, from a book, imperfectly understood and inadequately remembered. But this utterance, he seemed to think, was conclusive.

I could only sit and moan. Then I pointed

out to Chris that he was under the impression that he was suffering already, and that he wanted relief; but he denied that: he said he only felt dirty and dreary, to which I replied that that was precisely what suffering is—not an exciting thing at all, but the absence of all excitement—a lame, crushed, limping, evil-smelling condition; and he told me smilingly that he believed I was possessed by the devil.

I am really beginning to feel wretched about the whole business. I am very much devoted to Chris, and I want to keep him, not only for myself, but for all the people who depend on him—though on reflection I am not sure that I care so much about the other people!

Then I tried metaphysics. I said that to be really happy (and to put it plainly it was that which he was after) a man needed a balance of at least six temperaments—idealist, cynic, artist, man of business, seeker after truth, mystic. He showed some faint interest in this. "Now," I said, "you are sacrificing at least four of these, leaving only idealist and mystic—and that's no good." "It's a simplification, at all events," he said.

I could have struck him; I felt the need of hurting him, and I said, "Are you sure it isn't a form of selfishness? Your life is a beautiful one now, though you don't see it; and that

makes it all the more beautiful. You make all the difference in the world to about a dozen people, and you are going to throw it all away for the sake of trying to be original!"

But Chris only laughed. "That's the kind of argument," he said, "which you might use to a fallen woman, who wanted to return to a life of virtue!—but don't let us lose our tempers over this, old man!"

"It's a sign of health to lose one's temper," I said, "and your painful equanimity and considerateness are the most dangerous features of the case!"

It sounds very brutal, but it seems to me that the only chance is to get past his guard somehow—or rather, he seems to me like a man asleep in a boat, drifting down to a cataract, who must somehow be awakened. I mean to do my best, but the truth is that Chris is so used to hearing from me the kind of talk that I call humorous and my friends call offensive, that he cannot believe how serious I am. I suppose I myself shall have to begin repenting next, and thinking it my duty to go into a monastery; but life is much too grim a thing to play tricks with!

The process of disengagement continues.

I had another interesting talk with Chris last night; he walked away with me from a dinner

at the Hawksleys. It was rather a select dinner, the Philistine element carefully weeded out. Devenish the novelist was there, a stout, featureless man, rather shaky on his legs, with a rolling, merry eye and a small, pursed-up mouth, which, however, in the course of the evening admitted a good allowance of food and drink into the inner man. I distinctly like Devenish; he is friendly and polite. He makes a large income by his books, but showed no desire to talk about them or glory in them—and indeed there is every reason why he should not. One can always tell exactly what books Devenish has been reading from the helpless variation of style. He will begin a novel in the style, more or less, of Henry James, and end it in the style of George Moore. But there is some sort of appeal about his books, some relish for life. One feels on reading them as if one were sitting down to a meal with a kindly, rather foolish host, but who gives his guests a warm handshake and a real welcome. You don't feel you are being lectured or even called upon to admire; you are just made free of an inferior but thoroughly genial mind.

Then there was little Eyre, who writes pleasant weekly articles of what is called a suggestive kind in papers like the *Corinthian*, and *Byplay*. They are sentimental stuff, loose in

construction, but with a certain charm of style. He has a lean, hard-bitten, rather anxious face and a conciliatory smile.

The talk was very discursive, a little about books, a great deal about people, whom we were careful to call personalities. Devenish talked freely and good-humouredly, liking everything, approving of everybody, seeing the good side of abrupt and offensive personages, without any discrimination or irony, just ladling out a sort of boyish zest, with shrill laughter and many inclusive gestures of his podgy little hands. He was very civil to Eyre, not diplomatically, but effusively, and Eyre backed him up with an almost exaggerated deference, which obviously pleased Devenish,—though in his place I should have felt a little suspicious. Chris was at his best, and, as always, manœuvred the talk by adroit changes of subject, and little deft appeals. Altogether the evening was a success. But as we walked away to my quarters, Chris was a good deal more outspoken.

"Did you ever hear such stuff as we talked to-night?"

"I don't know about that," I said. "I thought it a very comfortable and mildly interesting evening."

"It was *easy* enough," said Chris—"but those two fellows, Devenish and Eyre, seemed

to me very second-rate. Do you believe they *care* in the least for what they write? They seemed to me very amiable human beings, whose art—if it can be called art—simply consists in serving out attractive platefuls of optimistic and agreeable impressions to their customers. They aren't serious, either of them—just civil hucksters!"

"I thought them very modest and sensible fellows," I said.

"Yes," said Chris, "but thoroughly second-rate, and without the least respect for art, just pleased with the world for being so easily hoodwinked."

"No, I thought them both honest and prosperous men."

"Exactly so," said Chris, "but I don't think that art should be used like that—it's degrading! I got no ideas or criticism or sense of values out of them. I thought it all rather vulgar."

"Well, you see, I don't live on the heights," I said.

"Come, Jack," said Chris, putting his arm in mine, "don't try to make me feel a pompous ass. If you and I can't say what we really think, without affectation, who can? You know perfectly well what I mean. Think of the other evening when we met old Ferrers. That was something like; he was tongue-tied, awkward.

obstructed. But he said half a dozen things, clumsily enough, and burst out into sweats and blushes at displaying his own dignity; but they were things which opened windows into life, and made one feel that there *is* after all something both grand and grim in the background. Ferrers made me feel both inspired and ashamed—as if I had caught him praying fervently and with tears in a back bedroom. And then he said what he did not to make an impression, but because he couldn't help saying it, despondently, indignantly, almost ferociously. Surely you liked that better than to hear these two sleek pussy-cats trying to drown each other's purring?"

"They *did* purr," I said. "That's quite true; but I am always so glad when anyone can."

"And I," said Chris, "am so thankful to know that anyone has it in him to scream and groan!"

"Well, I don't take the tragic view," I said.

"No, you like to be deceived," said Chris. "Good Heavens, how the power of expression nowadays has outrun our power of feeling! Oh, this talking to pass the time, the sham, vamped-up opinions, the desperate attempts to be funny—all the clipping and paring and fitting in one's opinions into other people's deplorable

minds—the idiotic enthusiasms, the drowsy perceptions, the diligently elaborated platitudes! It all ends in our straining and abusing our emotions for the sake of being able to feel for a mellow hour that the world is a jolly good place—when a hundred yards away everything is going damnably wrong and weltering in dreariness and cruelty. It makes me sick, rebellious, ashamed."

"But what would you do to change it all?"

"That's just it—I can't do anything except feel ashamed of being such a vulgar wretch, such a flattened-out man! I have been trained on these conventional lines, till I can't be uncivil. I can't call down fire from heaven on them, and that's what they deserve."

"They would only use it to light their cigarettes! But I'm not so *exalté* as you. I like food and light and human company and compliments—with just a little loophole every now and then for me to shoot an arrow from."

"Yes, we are mere defenders!" said Chris. "We are not in the attacking force. Look at the way we behave about the world—we know too much about it, we listen at the keyhole. These wretched newspapers cram us not with bare truth but with carefully selected picturesque facts; and then we make a further selection for our own satisfaction, and feel that it is all so

splendid, and that human nature is all so adorable. We live a drugged existence; what we want is to get back to real problems, however small, real uncompromising beliefs, if we can find any, and to contract our horizon into hard detail, not to extend it into infinite haze. That's why I am breaking away from this fatuous and imaginary prosperity."

"You are going to sulk in your tent, in fact," said I. "I'm not made like that—I am going to continue to hand round the plates and fill the glasses."

"Oh, yes," said Chris. "It's very unselfish and generous of you. But I don't think it wholesome to live a life one despises. If one pays too much attention to nature she doesn't recompense you—she simply leaves you alone."

(5)

[Broadway, Worcs.]

Chris and I are here together, established at the Lygon Arms, a beautiful old rambling hostelry, once an ancient manor-house, stone-mullioned and panelled, full of pretty things and, what is even more necessary, well equipped with modern requirements. Chris appears to have been most practical. He has got a list of possible houses from a local agent, all more or less within reach. His retreat is not to be a secluded and inaccessible hermitage, I find: he sets great store on there being a station close by, so that his friends can get at him.

I made up my mind that I wouldn't be always grinding away at my own point of view and scolding him. I am not a good special pleader. I get excited, and put too sharp an edge on my sentences, and crack the whip too loud; and my epigrams, such as they are, tend to be of the bitter variety.

I told him this after dinner the first night; we have got a lovely panelled sitting-room, with a low ceiling and an uneven floor; and when we established ourselves, Chris seemed to me to be

rather distrait, and even shy. So I took the bull by the horns, and said that I quite realised it was his business and not mine, and that he had a perfect right to decide for himself unchallenged. I said that I had just two points I wanted to put before him, and that after that I should not speak of the subject again, unless he started it, but devote myself to house-hunting—a special hobby of mine—with my whole heart and soul.

He laughed, and said that he frankly did not think that arguments were much good, but he would like to hear my two points. So I said that I should have felt differently about it all, if he had been flying from a poisonous sort of success, and were finding that, as Ruskin said, whenever a man produced something really memorable, the world did its best, by fêting him and running after him, to prevent his ever producing anything else on the same level. He replied to this that it was true he had not made a literary success, but that he believed that what prevented him from doing better work was the way in which his whole existence seemed to be taken up with helping idle people to avoid *ennui*.

"I don't want to say anything ungracious," he added, "and I have some very good friends in town—but these constant wretched engage-

ments prevent my even making the most of my *real* friends."

He went on to say that his main reason was not that he hoped to do anything great—it was much simpler than that. He felt that all that was best in him was just melted out of him by the incessant talk and sociability. "It may sound priggish," he said, "but there's an awful unreality about everything that I do or think, and I feel I *must* break with that; and I hope that by being a good deal more alone, I may at all events find out whether there is anything real and vital in my mind at all. I'm not strong enough," he added, "to alter all my habits here and discipline myself. However many resolutions I made, I should break them all. I am very weak-minded—and I don't pretend it is not a *flight*!" I agreed that this was a matter which only he could decide, and I went on to my second point. I said I was afraid of what might happen to him. "Your mind," I said, "seems to me like a wood full of birds, and living as you do, many of their voices are silent—or at all events you do not hear them. But if you go off alone, you will begin to hear the voices of the hidden birds—and I am not sure you will like it." "What do you mean exactly by *birds*?" he said. "Impulses, ideas, fancies," I said, "which have never had

a chance of making themselves audible. You think you are going away for silence and reflection; but it won't be so. I think you will hear all kinds of unexpected cries, and that you will find the isle to be full of noises—some of them very much louder and more insistent, and even more dangerous, than you know."

He sat a little while in silence, and then said that he thought he knew his own mind fairly well, and that he didn't think that there was much that was dangerous about it—"You think I shall come to grief in some way?" he said.

"Well, it won't be all rapture and refined delight," I said. "I don't of course think you will come to grief in a gross or squalid way—but I think you may grow obsessed and morbid, see ghosts perhaps, or ugly things like the man in the Palace of Art—things that you won't be able to speak of to other people, and will hardly be able to define to yourself—things moving behind you, shadows falling on your paper, figures slipping away round corners, faces dully staring."

"Haunted first, and then paralysed," he said, laughing; "well, I will take my chance of that!"

"Then there's an end of it," I said, "so go ahead, and inherit the earth, and entertain angels unawares."

And then we talked of other things.

(6)

[Broadway.]

We have had a glorious week. Very cool and bright, big clouds sailing briskly along in a blue sky, trees mistily wrapped in the fresh green of early spring, orchards whitening, clear wide views outspread. We have walked, biked, motored. Providence, or whatever it may be, has favoured us. The first day we saw a place that might do—a pretty stone house in a village, with a decent garden, but a little too near the rude forefathers of the hamlet. The second day a hovel, faked up by some amateur, down in the level. The third day a charming house, but tucked away in a fold of the hill with a steep road up to it, and a lane beyond, among woods, going up to the open down; and it's a tiresome thing always to start off either up hill or down. The fourth day, a very good house, but a decidedly poor garden, close to a churchyard. Still, all but one of these were hopeful; and to-day we have got a prize.

It didn't look very promising as we approached the place; bare, treeless fields, gentle slopes, a

few clumps and many stone walls; but suddenly without much warning the road went down into a rather steep little valley with a good many trees, crossed a stream—such a stream—crystal waters, clean gravelled spaces, thick velvety undulations of bright green water-weed. A little farther down, a hamlet of huddled houses with an orange-grey church-tower rising above the stone-tiled roofs; and just at this point, on the other side of the stream, approached by a stone bridge and a gateway with stone balls on the posts, was a grey gabled house, a barn with a round window in the gable, a turfed garden with flowers, a few arbutus-bushes and cypresses, and the little declivity of the valley-side running sharply up behind the house, with a dozen big sycamores leaning over. I sate down and gazed, while Chris rushed down to the village for a key, and came back with a prattling, sturdy woman, and a quite enchanting little girl aged about eight, who behaved with demure confidence, ending up by seizing Chris's hand and refusing to be parted from him. That I think finished him off.

Inside was a little hall with two small parlours on each side—good offices—we are very particular about that; there is to be sound eating and drinking at Charters, as the house is called—and then there is quite a big room at the

back, with a large open fireplace. Three good bedrooms above, and fine timbered attics. It wants some doing up; a bailiff lived there, who has moved into a neighbouring farm. Why it hasn't been taken I can't conceive, except that it is not quite big enough for a family house, and rather too big for a single man. The village is called Grendon Despard—and there is a station, on the Cheltenham branch line, a mile away. Chris was so *épris* with the house that he actually *wired* to the agent that he would take it. The rent is said to be only £50.

One of the prettiest things is that in the back garden there is quite a big spring bursting out of the little hillside from a stone spout, tumbling in a silvery curve with a cool liquid gurgle into a big stone cistern. Chris suggested that Ida (Ada, I suspect) should have a bath there, but she said prudently that she was sure there was a toad hiding in it. It runs away into a stone channel across the rough grass lawn, and joins the stream by the bridge. "Never dry, winter or summer," said the good woman, "and keeps you company if you are alone." And as we stood by it, the voice of the spring came insistently to our ears, as though it had some pretty tale of its own to tell.

We had not time to explore further to-day, but we are to go over to-morrow to look round.

Chris was silent as we came back, the silence which comes of rapid pleasant thoughts crowding on each other's heels.

He discoursed a good deal this evening of his plans of life; gardening, exploring, reading, writing, but no talk of any company; and now he is writing letters—he is very business-like—to the agent about drains, repairs, and other sordid details—to a furniture warehouse; he took measurements of all the rooms. I feel that he is becoming very anxious to find himself alone; he is full of friendly communications, but I have the sense that I am a little in the way already.

(7)

[Broadway.]

I FEEL in rather a solemn mood, like Phædo recording the last sentient hours of Socrates! Chris is entirely absorbed in the idea of Charters, inclined almost to think that it has been reserved unlet for him by Providence. I myself take a different view! The house is so charming and the neighbourhood so beautiful, that I can't help feeling there is something in the background; some disadvantage or inconvenience not yet discovered by us, or some sinister shadow, guarded from us in cautious secrecy by the village folk. I framed some questions today with a view to discovering this from the caretaker, but could elicit nothing, not even reluctant confusion. We shall see!

Meanwhile, all things being irretrievably settled, Chris shows much more willingness to discuss the future. He opened the matter himself. He said he knew he was a dilettante. That is true; up at Cambridge, where I first knew him a dozen years ago, he was an elegant trifler. He got a second class in classics, but

not by reading. He was musical, sociable, literary. He did not himself do much in the way of entertaining—he was not well-off—but everyone wanted to secure him. He was always good-natured, and talked with a gently provoking kind of charm, though it was then comparatively crude and immature. He had outbursts of an odd, petulant Puritanism, which was very engaging: he used to protest. I meanwhile was a more or less serious student in history; and now Chris thinks he must have a good, dull, far-reaching subject, and do solid reading. I have marked out a few periods for him; and this inspired me to inquire a little more particularly into his intended mode of life —what exactly he wanted to *do*, if he could find time for it; and here again I discern the weakness of his scheme; it is negative and exclusive. It is a rout, not a quest, based on a repulsion for his present life.

I gather he is going to keep himself in high training, to see the sun rise, to read in the mornings, to walk or bicycle in the afternoons, to write before dinner, to read again. He says in a general way that he wants to live, not to be for ever dangling about in the ante-rooms of life. But what he doesn't seem to me to realise is that it is excitement of some kind which makes people enjoy life—falling in love, running risks,

being confronted with difficulties which can be surmounted, ambition, fame, power. The one thing, I humbly think, which has made his life worth living hitherto is having been at the centre of this circle of ours, all of whom confided in him, wanted his help to untie troublesome knots, depended upon him. It matters little who or what the people are, if you only feel you are responsible for them. Of course our circle is an insignificant one, in the sense that it doesn't count for much. But that is not the point. It isn't the bigness of the affair so much as the difficulty which really interests one. In my own grosser sphere, what interests me is not the amount of profit involved (that has a separate interest of its own) but the intricacy of a job, having to outwit an unscrupulous competitor, having to harmonise hostile elements.

Of course Chris is tranquil by nature, not passionate, not at all prejudiced—it is this which makes his charm so great—but I don't see that he has got a single real problem in front of him in his new life, except the problem of how to fill his time. He hopes to weed his days of incongruous, squalid, jarring, brutal incidents, and he doesn't see that he may only end by getting it all simply tepid and glutinous. I can't waste my pity on his and my associates: they are simply rather clever, amateurish, talka-

tive, amiable, selfish people, who know a good thing when they see it and have got Chris very cheap—they first exploited him, and then formed a Chris-habit, which will be infernally hard to break off!

I think that Chris will have a very good time to begin with. He has starved and suppressed the unsophisticated part of himself all this time, and it is very genuine. But I don't see in him any of those tough collecting instincts which make, for instance, Rudd go out, day after day, when he gets the chance, into the Saltfleet Marshes to look for birds, quite content to watch them and see them and not wanting to write or talk about them; to do this all day and every day, and to be a mere blowsy and sunburnt bore in the evenings. I don't know from personal experience what the collecting passion is, but I spent a month once in the company of Elton the botanist. He went out every day to Boxworth wood, and collected oxlips, cowslips, primroses and their various hybrids, first of all in bud, then in flower, then only in leaf. I forget the whole dreary complication, but I can't forget his perfectly intolerable delight at obtaining what he called an asynchronous hybrid, which passed, so to speak, through some other flower, which bridged the gap. Elton didn't want the credit of it, it didn't feed his imagina-

tion, or his intellect, or even his soul—it was just the pleasure of absolutely clearing up a small point—an instinct quite unknown to me; nor do I think that Chris has a particle of it. His mind is essentially hazy.

Then there is the poetical side. That might keep a man going.

> "Might a soul bathe there and be clean,
> And slake his drought?"

Chris might certainly arrive at considerable cleanliness: his is a very unspotted soul: but bathing isn't in itself an occupation, until it becomes an obsession—a "Lutro-maniac"—like my poor cousin who has washed his hands into the likeness of two lumps of Cambridge sausages —pale and flaccid cylinders; and then has to open a door with his hand muffled in his side-coat-pocket, and afterwards wash the handle for fear that his coat has communicated some pollution!

But the "drought" is the question. Chris is never thirsty. It isn't in the least that he is characterless—he hates, but he doesn't want to maul what he hates; he loves, but he doesn't want to possess the beloved one. He has no jealousy. He is really and truly civilised.

But that's the point; if he has a passion, it is for benevolence and sympathetic compromise.

A misunderstanding between two of his friends makes him miserable; he can't rest till he has put it straight. This is a very beautiful quality, but an exhausting one; and it is from the resulting exhaustion that he is flying.

What I really fear is that he will be gradually bored without perhaps knowing it; and then some artful and attractive female, perhaps of quite a different stratum, will fall in love with him, and throw herself upon his chivalry—and then I don't know what will happen.

You see he is a polygamist by nature; one ideal does not dethrone another—they are all, all honourable men! He standardises, he doesn't discriminate. In leaving Chris in the Cotswolds, I shall feel as if I were leaving a pretty and innocent sister in a den of stockbrokers. They wouldn't mean any harm, but harm there would be.

(8)

[Gray's Inn.]

We really had rather a tragic affair last night; we all know about the purgative effects of tragedy, acting through pity and terror; well, I had a large dose last night; and it makes it all ten times worse when one knows and cares about the people concerned.

Chris stayed on at Broadway after I left, and settled up things with remarkable promptitude. He has got hold of a nice elderly couple, man and wife, to look after him; the house has had to go through a mysterious process of rubbing and scrubbing, after being papered and painted; he has put in some furniture, and now his rooms here are to be dismantled. So he has come back to see about it, and with his sense of justice and decorum and loyalty—there isn't one word for it in English, but it is *pietas* in Latin, like Telemachus in Tennyson's *Ulysses*:

> "Decent not to fail
> In offices of tenderness"—

he has been having all the old gang in to dinners

and luncheons—farewell banquets, three guests at a time. The old gang, by the way, are playing up, and we are going to give him a grand piano.

It fell to me to go last night, and the other two guests were Lady Jane and Gladys Holmes. I felt from the first that we were in for something rather dreadful. I have never *quite* understood the relations of Chris with Gladys; of course, poor girl, she would have married him at any moment, if he had lifted a finger; and any girl a little less nice would have landed him long ago—but she is above all that; and I think that Chris is about as fond of her as it is possible to be without wanting to marry her. Personally, I think her one of the most beautiful creatures I know, so fresh and fine and spirited, really caring passionately about beautiful and big things, but with a priceless sense of humour, and a really light touch. How Chris can be such a fool! but it is just that sort of folly which makes him so unlike other people; how anyone can see so much of Gladys, and know her so well, without wanting to make love to her, I can't conceive; but there it is! And then there's Lady Jane, who is in love with Chris, too, in her own way, though she is old enough almost to be his mother; and then there is myself, caring so much for Chris and

all he means, that I am deeply and sullenly angry with him for his perversity.

You see, Chris does *really* perceive the incredible absurdity and vile humorousness of life; he sees right through it; he isn't sentimental, so he can't put *that* varnish on; and he isn't a cynic, so he can't surrender himself to the enjoyment of mere perception. That kind of insight ought to make one stronger in dealing with life. But Chris comes to no conclusions. These idle and selfish people who steal the money he makes (I don't mean old Jane or Gladys, but the rest) have their moments of sloppy emotion; a sentimentalist would be taken in by that, and think he had got down to the real thing, the primal tenderness; but such emotion is a mere mood, only another instance of admiring the right thing for the wrong reason; these little people enjoy their emotions, stimulate them, play with them—disgusting!

But all this perception does *not* make Chris stronger—it makes him weaker; and the way he has turned his back on his bit of the world is a sign of weakness, not of strength.

Many of our friends have acute perceptions too; they see the ebb and flow of each other's moods, they understand the causes—and they end by making excuses for everything, and think that is a fine sort of tolerance; it isn't;

it is only the tolerance which results from not really feeling anything. But Lady Jane and Gladys *do* really care; they are themselves always; they don't just instinctively take their colour from their friends; they don't play the part of being for everyone the sort of person that each witness expects; they are kind and sympathetic, but never hypocritical—not that the others are purposely hypocritical—it is just the natural predatory instinct of sexuality. Jane and Gladys are never predatory.

Well, there we four were; and Chris, confound him, was radiant and serene, with the air of a man who has had a troublesome tooth out, or disposed of a long and wearing anxiety. Lady J. was sad, with the sadness of a woman who has learnt to expect that life has always more trouble than happiness in store—"one more good thing gone, as usual"—a resigned sadness. But poor Gladys was in active revolt, with the air, I couldn't help thinking, of the dog who has managed to slip out for a walk with his master unseen, and who is detected and sent sternly back.—"Here's the dear person whom I love; why mayn't I walk with him? why is he so cruel?"—But she put a brave face on it, though I am bound to say that Chris was maddening—it's his infernal diffidence—the very thing again that makes him so delightful, that he never takes

for granted he is wanted, but always works so hard for approval.

It was really like walking with an open candle through a heap of high explosives.

We began all right—many questions about Charters—where exactly it was, what it looked like; and then we went on to planning exactly how we should spend the day there, and it all seemed at once so solemn and so thin, like a nun describing her services and meditations. To me it was exactly like a scene in a book, with this frightful difference, that in a book everyone says what they are thinking and feeling, and that was just the one thing which none of us dared to do. That is the worst of the few real tragedies at which I have assisted, that no one says anything, except about the weather, or the clock being slow. And then poor old Jane must needs talk about the neighbourhood of Charters, and all the nice people within reach; and Chris said he had made the Vicar of Crendon's acquaintance, and that he seemed quite a rational person; he described the study hung with old college photograph-groups, the golf-clubs and fishing-rods in the corner, the rack of pipes, the shelf with a row of medicine bottles, Alford's *Greek Testament*, and Spurgeon's *Outlines* on the table, and then the drawing-room, rather stuffy, with a smell of

stale chintzes; the rather anxious, hard-featured Vicaress, and the stolid children at tea, whispering into their mother's ear—all very lightly touched; and all the time Gladys looking like Ophelia.

"Did he mean to live *quite* like a hermit?" hazarded Lady Jane, "because the Bethunes would be so glad . . ."

"My dear lady," said Chris, a little nettled, I thought, "I have no programme whatever—I shall just take things as they come—you would think I was going to go about like a gorilla, thumping my chest and booming!"

"I can't see it," said Lady Jane: "I can't see it at all."

"But that's just why I'm going to try the experiment," said Chris. "I can't see it either. I don't expect signs and miracles. I just want to face things in a prosaic way."

This was too much for Gladys. Dinner was nearly over—she had hardly eaten anything, I noticed, and had been sitting back in her chair, with her hands clasped in her lap, open-eyed. She leaned forwards. "I'm afraid I don't understand—are we all so artificial—so unreal?"

"No, indeed," said Chris, "but I am afraid that *I* am getting so."

"Why, Chris," said Lady Jane, with a very

heart-broken smile, "you often seem to me the one thing that *is* real!"

There was a horrid little silence, and Gladys caught her breath in what was all too obviously a sob, though she turned it into a sort of cough.

I saw that something must be done, and I talked like poor Poll, shooting down cart-loads of texts into the Slough of Despond. Gladys sat looking at Chris, and he, a little pale, I thought, sate smiling at his plate. He pulled himself together, opened a cigarette-box, handed it to Lady Jane, who waved her hand and shook her head, offered it to Gladys—their eyes met. . . .

What a devilish place the world is, I thought; and we had an hour or two to get through still! The sound of my voice sickened me.

We went into the little book-room presently, such a nice bare *cabinet de travail*, I have always thought. I thanked my stars that there was not going to be any music—that would have finished us. But once there, I resolutely pinned old Jane in the corner, with a faint hope that Chris and Gladys might have it out. If he could but take *her* away with him to that dreadful house—the thought of Charters was loathsome to me—it would be all right.

But we were all at too close quarters. Chris and Gladys began to talk. "What *is* it all

about?" said Lady Jane to me faintly. She had quite lost her oracular powers for the time being, and had come down to plain questions. "Oh, don't ask me," I said, "I have done my best to upset Chris's plans!" But one can't hold two *tête-à-têtes* in a small room: confused fragments of talk reached me. Chris was explaining the precise meaning of the word *virtuoso*, and Gladys said she felt quite relieved—she had been afraid that she had used it wrongly.

The ladies got away at last, and Lady Jane was supreme—she said she looked forward to getting a really convincing book from Chris about the pleasures of solitude. Gladys shook hands in silence.

I was transported with rage. We went upstairs and sate down. Chris seemed quite innocent and happy.

"Chris, old man," I said, "you are a real fool!"

"Yes," he said, smiling, "in a general way, I admit, but not in this particular business."

"Don't you see?" I said.

"Yes, perfectly," said Chris, "at least I see what your good-natured old self is driving at; but we can't be bumped into paths of peace, you know."

I rose to go—"Oh, I hoped you would stay a little longer," said Chris.

"Not a single instant," I said. "You are inhuman—you have become a pillar of salt—I suppose this is the end?"

"Only of this chapter," said Chris, "and of course I wish you wouldn't take it like this. I am not worth this fuss; you will all get on perfectly well without me; haven't I seen the same thing happen a dozen times? And I can't and won't pretend that I repent. I know what I am about, and I haven't any choice. I must get away; and if I find I have made a mistake, I shall just come back."

"And what about Gladys?" I said.

Chris made a little gesture, as though he were putting something into my outstretched hand; and I knew what he meant.

And then I went away. I didn't even trust myself to look round. "*Voilà une soirée bien passée,*" as George Moore's friend said. But I went away not so much in sorrow as in fear.

PART II

(9)

[Gray's Inn.]

So Chris has vanished from our sight! He makes no sign at present, though Lady Jane had a letter from him, over which she shook her head to me. "He won't come back!" she said; and then she suddenly asked me what I thought about Chris and Gladys, not without a touch of sharpness—a little underlying jealousy, I suppose. "Gladys doesn't understand him," she said. "What Chris wants is close, intimate, tranquil friends, with emotions well under control. He hates the physical side of everything, I believe. It seems degrading to him. Have you ever noticed," she went on, looking sideways at me, "that Chris hates being *touched*—he doesn't even like shaking hands?"

"Oh dear, yes," I said, "it has always been a case of *noli me tangere* with Chris."

"Isn't that rather cold-blooded?" she said.

"I don't know," I said. "He isn't afraid of intimacy. He tells his friends a great deal more about his feelings and preferences and ideas

than most men ever tell even to their wives. He doesn't shrink from laying bare his soul—in fact, in that respect he is incredibly nude, so to speak. He rather likes confessing his faults and lapses. He hasn't any reticence or reserve."

"And that is just what makes him so dangerously attractive," said Lady Jane. And she gave a sigh which was certainly not for Gladys.

Presently she said to me, "I am going to make a confidence to you, Jack, of the kind which a woman doesn't often make to a man. We women are very hard on our own sex, but we don't give them away. I think you care about Gladys in a way?"

"Who does not?" I said. "But she has very little to say to me!"

"On the contrary," said Lady Jane, "she trusts you implicitly."

"She certainly does not do so explicitly!" I said. "But let me hear what you were going to say."

"Well," said Lady Jane, "I spoke to her very seriously the other day. I said she ought not to be so woebegone; and that it was the first time I had ever thought her undignified."

"That must have been very bracing!" I said.

"Oh, Jack, it's no use talking to you," said

Lady Jane, "and when I was trying to be so serious!"

"Then I will be serious, too," I said. "It's just this! There are the two people I care most about in the whole world, and I can't help either of them. Gladys wants what she doesn't get, and Chris gets what he doesn't want. What is one to do?"

"I have very little pity for Gladys," said Lady Jane, rather acidly, "though of course I would do anything for her."

"Of course," I said.

"But if it was really for Chris's happiness," said Lady Jane, ignoring my remark, "I would——"

"Yes, what *would* you do?" I said.

"Then what do *you* think about it?"

"Just this," I said. "It would be perfect if Chris cared about Gladys as—well, as I do, to be quite frank! But he doesn't—he's an impersonal creature. And I think he could be wrought upon by rhetoric and reproaches to marry her; and I believe it would be hell for both of them—that's what I think!"

"I can't help feeling that Chris is altogether rather shirking his duty," said Lady Jane. "He is too much in love with his own tranquillity."

"No," I said rather fiercely. "He is *not* shirking, and I think he would give up his tran-

quillity without a moment's hesitation, if he felt it would be right. I believe that Chris would march to his death to help a friend; he would throw his life away. But no one can give away his mind, his life, himself, to a relation which doesn't exist. Women can sometimes do it, bless them! men can't, at least strong men can't. If Chris did this, it would be done out of his weakness, with the worst part of him. Chris does *not* shirk the duties of friendship. He has gone away, partly because he was bored with the life he was leading—and I don't wonder. He is like a full-bred racer who finds himself engaged in turning the crusher of a cider-mill—and precious sharp cider when it comes! He wants to have a little wholesome life of his own. But he is also going away for the sake of Gladys; to give her a chance of giving to someone else the precious thing which he can't accept, and which she can and ought to give away. That is the truth!"

"But how do you know all this?" said Lady Jane limply. "Has he said anything about it to you?"

"Of course not," I said, "and it is that which makes it so certain!"

(10)

[Gray's Inn.]

It is all very well for Chris to be indulging himself in high jinks down at Charters. There was a charming and leisurely sentence in one of his last letters—"*the wind, which in London seemed always so restless and worn-out, laden with twice-breathed airs and unwholesome combustions, here blows steadily over the hill, bringing the clean scents of meadow and wood, of upland and river-valley, and overflowing with an abundance of pleasant secrets to whisper in my ear. . . .*" Well, if the wind ever blows from the south-east, and whispers the sort of thing that is being said about him in our poor old circle here, Chris won't feel quite so much at his ease, I fear!

We really are having a *beastly* time; it is just as if all the old family servants had given warning at once. I did not realise quite how much Chris mattered to each of us, and how much his quiet and affectionate good sense disinfected, so to speak, our morbid possibilities. The situation is composed of several evil elements, (1) a very stupid and annoying determination to pretend that Chris doesn't matter,

and that we can get on perfectly well without him; (2) a huffy and slighted feeling that he should have been able to dispense with us so easily, and considerable vexation at his being so happy; (3) a total absence of any power of dealing with the little abrupt ill-considered remarks that lead to squabbles. The fact is that Chris has spoilt us about this; if such things were said, he always intervened; and if there was any venomous intention in the words, he always took it as directed against himself, and laughed it away. I can hear his soft, rather husky voice saying at one of Lady Northover's stiletto-pricks, not intended for him at all, "Oh, I think you are a little hard on me." But now the thrusts go home. (4) There is no one now for anyone to confide in. A grievance was always confided to Chris, and he used to explain (with extreme insincerity) that no harm was *meant*. (5) No one now hands on the little creditable and friendly things that were said behind people's backs. Chris was very good at this.

Then Lady Jane has lost her spring. She has a way of staring at nothing in particular, with her mouth down at the ends, like a goldfish in an aquarium, and saying, "Who is there now to ask about this?" which is entirely exasperating; and Gladys Holmes looks ten years

older, and though she does her best, she has lost that dancing look in her eyes which kept everyone alert.

And the worst of it all is that it doesn't seem even dimly possible to ask Chris to come back, for the sake of such a crew as we have shown ourselves to be. There is no pretence now of intelligent talk—it is all personal gossip of a rather low kind. Chris used to give a kind of distinction even to gossip, by making it out to be an interesting problem rather than a souse of dirty water. What was funny has become vulgar; what was serious has become priggish.

Then there is a dreadful tendency for everyone to blame everyone else for our degradation, when it isn't really degradation, only a case of sheep without a shepherd.

Last night, at dinner with the Aschams, Northover with engaging frankness, yawned and said:

"Well, I must say this is uncommonly tedious!"

"Why not raise the tone yourself for once?" says Freddy Gilbert.

"I'm not responsible," said Northover, "we hard-worked men come here to be soothed and amused!"

"After all the kindnesses showered upon him!" says Mrs. Ascham.

"Name one!" said Northover.

"Oh, we can't begin proclaiming our good works," says Mrs. Ascham.

"I'm afraid it is throwing pearls before swine, Ella," says Lady Northover, with one of her devilish smiles.

"No, I don't pretend they are pearls," says Mrs. Ascham.

"You're more sure about the swine," says Freddy.

So it went on, like the beating of tin pots together. It is all so barbarous.

The fact is, that Chris began at the right end; he established a kind of comradeship with each of us; and that done, you can be amused by your friends' defects, and prejudices, and pettinesses; all the things which would put you off if you began at the other end. Mannerisms do not really matter very much among old friends—in fact they increase the interest and amusement of life. What matters is the unison or the aloofness of the inner self; and Chris, I now see, acted as the soul of the circle; and you can draw nearer to people by an hour or two of affectionate confidence than by years of the most intelligent observation.

But now anarchy prevails; we are aware of each other's faults; we make no allowances.

We say, " if he doesn't see that this sort of thing won't go down, he must be told so plainly," and when once people begin telling each other of their faults, a circle is doomed. Chris didn't do that: he was an interpreter; he reminded us of our own and of other people's virtues.

(11)

[Gray's Inn.]

I was sitting with Lady Jane to-day. We were discussing whether Chris had a real sense of beauty.

"He is a little short-sighted," I said. "He doesn't see outline, only mellow distances and sunset flushes."

"He doesn't like beauty that discomposes him," Jane said.

"My dear lady, that's an admirable criticism! I always feel you are a writer wasted."

Lady Jane bridled: "Chris has no pity on beauty," she said; "beauty, however honest, is always going about hoping to be admired. But that is what makes Chris so strong, that he can admire without wanting to embrace."

"So that's the way to win affection, is it?" I said.

"My dear Jack," said Jane, "you are talking almost stupidly. You haven't the smallest idea what beauty is to a woman: I don't mean a flirting and giggling sort of beauty; but it gives women power, it gives them the chance of being

heard, of being taken seriously; it isn't the love-making and the sensual side we want—that's a mere price paid by some of the best women—it's the children, the equal comradeship, the being bound up with the life of the world. Ambitious careers, honours—those are just the childish fancies of men. We want to live a real life, not to be petted and played with. You think me rather an amusing, good-natured elderly woman, Jack. But I have missed my chance, and I have lost what beauty I ever had. But I am going to hold on with both hands and make the most of the second-best, as I can't have the best." She stopped suddenly, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

I was very bold—I took the old dear's hand and kissed it. I said, "My dear lady, don't talk like that. You have got a much better best than you know. You have a dozen friends who trust you through and through, and naturally turn to you for help and advice, and would miss you sorely, and feel the gap, and not forget you. You are worth fifty of most of us—you are good and gallant and wise!"

"My dear Jack," said Jane, "you have given me the best testimonial I have ever had in my life, and I'm more than grateful. I really didn't say what I said to fish for compliments. But I shall go on my way rejoicing and try to do

better. But don't get in the way of thinking trivially about women—they have a bad time, though they are better trained than men in covering it up."

"You needn't scold me," I said. "There is one woman—you know all about it—whom I would do anything to win; sell my soul, if I knew who would buy it—and she cares for someone else and thinks me a cynic and a bore. That's a cheerful position, isn't it?"

"You mustn't be faint-hearted, Jack," said Lady Jane. "There are often very curious and unexpected turnings in the road."

"Yes, but not always the right turning," I said.

(12)

[Gray's Inn.]

Here is Chris again. He is beginning to make friends everywhere; how is he to be disentangled? He writes:

"I have made friends with a splendid old farmer hard by, up at Byers farm. He has a big, comfortable homestead, a jolly mullioned house with a fine gabled porch, among rickyards and cattle-byres, full of enchanting farm-litter. He is an elderly man, but very shrewd. He has no belief in old methods, and he is always trying experiments. His weak point is that he dearly loves an audience. He gives me a detailed account of his plans, full of racy bits. This morning he delivered himself of a harangue about tares. *I always thought they were a deadly plague, like Californian poke-weed—or like the criticisms which Lady Northover slips adroitly into a glowing account of one of her friends, which somehow spoil the whole effect.*

"Not a bit of it! Put a bundle of tares and a truss of hay into a rack, and the cattle eat the tares

first. I thought they were probably dreary, spiky things like mandrakes, with the devil's hall-mark. But it seems they have handsome leaves and quite charming little pods of fruit. 'Don't you have a fallow,' says Farmer Spratt, 'it don't rest the soil, it makes it mischievous. You smother it with tares—'double scorn' we call them—all the tweetch goes (I haven't an idea what 'tweetch' is, but something very treacherous), and when you cut for fodder, the earth comes up meller—rotten, we call it—and fit for anything. It puts in what the wheat takes out. Ah, that's an interesting thing, the soil is!'

"So he runs on; and though I wouldn't spend a week in his company for any money—he has no conception of dialogue—yet it's like a slice of home-made bread and butter to spend half an hour with him. He takes no interest whatever in politics or religion. 'That's them's business!' he says, with a fine vagueness. He has got a lot of jolly children, very fond of their father, and a bustling, smiling wife who says, 'Lor, John, how you do go along about them tares!' and settles his tie for him, beaming with pride and pleasure in her old man.

"The labourers are less communicative; they don't seem to know anything about the country objects, as they are called. If I ask the name of a flower, they look at it suspiciously, turn it aside

with a hoe, and say, 'That'll be a cockle, maybe!' If I ask the name of a bird, 'That'll be a yaller-cock,' and I'm not much wiser. But they are good about the weather, and seldom make a mistake— 'Yes, it'll rain before evening, by the moon,' said an old man to me to-day, 'she seem'd to come over a bit furry yestereve.' All this delights me childishly. It's better than gossip and sham æsthetics."

My only hope is that Chris will get tired of it. It is all very well for a bit, but I think he is starving both his heart and his mind for the sake of cleanliness, so to speak!

He talks vaguely about asking some of us down; but he hasn't any idea of doing so, really. He seems to be writing a book, about the simple life, I expect, but he has got to test that first, "when the long dark winter evenings come."

He is perfectly genuine, of course, but he is not forcible enough to have a mission, or peremptory enough to call people away out of the world. He has lovers and admirers, but not followers; he isn't decisive or unpleasant enough for that; a real leader is generally unpleasant, so that when he unbends and praises, it is worth anything; but Chris doesn't really care for people, either individually or typically. They are merely quaint and picturesque and interesting figures to him. And I don't think he is enough of a

dreamer or a poet to go into solitude. He has nothing really to say, except to describe his own ingenuous delight; and he has not enough power of expression to produce great work; he is a courtier in the palace of art, an *attaché*. What I want to see is what he will do when he has ranged through and lounged in all the pleasant rooms in the palace of fancy, and comes at last down to the cellars of the mind—dark, cobwebbed, cold.

(13)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris continues to wave flags and pocket-handkerchiefs from Charters—not a very good sign. He has been there some months, and his letters still read like the letters of a hectic and stupefied traveller; he is still bewildered by his impressions. One would suppose he had never smelt the scent of hawthorns or seen a field of buttercups before. Everyone he meets is "*unspoilt*" or "*vital*" or "*amazing*"—this is all very bad, you know, and it doesn't serve to conciliate the bilious and dismal crew whom he once went about with in very tolerable content.

Of course the reason is obvious; he hates responsibility, and his present discoveries make no claim upon him. When they begin to do that they will begin to lose their fresh colour.

Meanwhile our poor little circle is beginning to break up, and it doesn't take much "unsoldering." The cracks widen, the plaster scales off.

We have just had a meeting of the Walker Club? It was an invention of Chris's, of course.

It met on the 4th of June at Cookham—the anniversary of the death of Fred Walker, who is buried there. It began by a visit to the churchyard, luncheon, a long dawdling afternoon rowing in the Cliveden reach, some bathing at Cookham Weir, a supper, and back late to town.

Chris had a great admiration for Fred Walker, because he belonged to no school and left no disciples. I remember four or five delicious days spent thus, the look of the steep dark woods of Cliveden coming down to the water's edge, and the hazy golden glimmer of the river-reaches as you lay in the shade. Chris made all the arrangements, and nothing ever went wrong; and I used to think how wonderfully he managed the talk. The wildest nonsense when we started; then as we rowed, some of those half-fanciful, half-pathetic things he used to say, which set people thinking and musing—then a lazy silence; and then he would read a few poems out of the little purple-bound book, in that mellow husky voice of his, which gave—to me at all events—that half-tormenting sense of the deliciousness of life floating so precariously on the dark stream of trouble; and then the row back in the level westering sunlight, by the edges of reed-beds and wide water-meadows, and the sense that everyone was really for once

under some spell of beauty and delight; and then, when we all seemed pledged to each other (I can't find any other word for it) the sentiment brushed briskly away, and every sort of absurd notion brandished before us. It wasn't only that he was so delightful, but he made everyone play the same game and enjoy it.

Well, a week ago we did it again. Harry Ascham did the arranging; and what a show it was! There was a saloon at Paddington [we used to skirmish about in twos and threes, finding places] and when we had got settled, Lady Jane said she felt as if she was in church, and that a harmonium might begin at any moment. Then we had some cricket and racing shop; and when we got to Cookham, Freddy Gilbert said he didn't feel quite religious enough to go and look at graves, and Harry felt anxious about the lunch. And when we got to the churchyard, Gladys was feeling the heat, and said she would go and rest in the church; I went with her and we sate in a pew, and Alastair said he must make an inspection, and returned saying that he was afraid the tone must be very evangelical, because he could only find some biscuits and a pocket-comb in the vestry.

Lunch was bearable, but too elaborate; and then we found that Harry had chartered a steam-launch. So we flocked on board, and

Alastair made up a bridge-party—two bridge-parties—in the saloon, which lasted most of the afternoon, and it was on the whole a mercy. And then Jerry Curtis produced a banjo, which he said that he preferred to call a shawm for the sake of the associations.

I don't know where we went to—it was all very vulgar; Freddy came up with a book, and said that as we were accustomed to hallow the day with poetry he would read aloud some of the works of the new bard, Petroleum K. Boffin. They weren't very good, and not even bad enough to dislike.

Lady Jane was very gallant. She said she felt so up-to-date, and replete with modern conveniences. We passed a punt with three young men asleep in it, and she said she felt inclined to say "Wake up, England." Freddy added a story of how he and a pal of his had once run into a punt, with two elderly men sitting on kitchen-chairs fishing for barbel, and how on the impact, the two elderly men fell simultaneously and silently into the river, rods and all, leaving their chairs empty. We laughed at that, rather too loud.

Iced coffee and cocktails about four o'clock; Freddy sang one of Petroleum K. Boffin's ditties to an extemporised accompaniment on the shawm. He said about this time that he pre-

ferred the new sort of Walker-rag to the old—he had always felt the old style to be a wee bit priggish, and he proposed Fred Walker's health and many of them. . . .

I got wedged with Gladys in two deck-chairs in the stern about this time—and nobody could get near us; the screw clucked and gurgled somewhere below. I said to her that I thought it all rather low, and that I was glad Chris at all events was out of it. "It would not have been like this if he had been in it," she said, adding, "How little we knew how much of it was *him*!" Then she said, "Do you hate it as much as I do?" "Well," I said, "I can't conceive that anyone loathes it *more*!" Then we began to wonder what Chris was doing, and I drew a little picture of him striding along through a jolly Cotswold village, looking about him, gossiping with the blacksmith, patting the old dog which comes pushing up to be noticed; or sitting with a book, sunburnt and alert, by the side of the gushing well on his lawn. . . .

"Do you think he is really happy," she said at last, pressing her long slim hands together.

"Very happy," I said; "quite extraordinarily so—I am sure of it!"

"Do you suppose he remembers what day it is," she said, "and wonders what we are doing?"

"Certainly," I said. "I have no sort of

doubt that he is thanking his stars that he isn't here."

She put her face in her hands for a moment, and I thought she was going to cry—but she didn't. "And *I* can't even behave decently to my old friends," she said. "What has happened to us? Are we as bad as that?"

"Jolly companions every one!" I said.

"Oh, Jack!" she said at last, "won't you be serious for a single instant? Don't you see we *must* do something? We *can't* go on like this!"

I mustn't give her away to the extent of writing down what she then said. But I had a glimpse into a very beautiful and *sensible* mind [that's almost the most tragic feature, her supreme common sense, without any illusion or sentiment to help her] which is both distracted and tortured, would give anything to help, go through fire and water for Chris's sake, bear anything in the world rather than be so gently and firmly ignored. I called Chris a fool to his face; but I don't think of him now as a fool at all—rather as a man with a tragic blindness, and a thrice-miserable lack, not of insight or goodness or kindness or loyalty or gentleness—he's really almost a perfect character in many ways—but of passion, of emotional vitality. He isn't selfish [I can't even have the satisfaction

of calling him that]—he is no doubt radiating goodwill and charm in those detestable Cotswolds; it is an awful sort of virginal purity, an icy hardness, from which he is suffering. He hasn't an atom of priggishness either; he is entirely modest and diffident. Most of us need to be cured of our sins; Chris, God help him, needs to be cured of his virtues.]

(14)

[Gray's Inn.]

I have had a bovine document from Chris at last, a mixture between a bill-of-fare and a page of Bradshaw. He gets up early, he walks, he reads, he writes, he goes to bed. He even pays calls. Food and drink and sleep are sweet to him; he disseminates what he reads; the sharp scents and flavours of his childhood are miraculously restored to him. What do I care? He is obviously very well and happy, and trying hard to believe that he has a mystic purpose in it all, a heavenly vision. But, thank God, he is not quite so hypocritical as to say so.

He sends me a few pages of his writing—wretched stuff—as lacking in construction and as headstrong in emphasis as a lark's song. He beats his wings, he thrills with joy, but that can't be written down. Ecstasy—it can only be expressed in short lyrics and music. The soliloquy, what a helpless convention! A man stands with his back to the fire; he stretches his legs, he looks out of the window, he smiles to himself; then he sits down again and picks up

his book; and the nearest that the helpless and harried writer can get to this is a soliloquy!

"To be or not to be—that is the question," etc., so spouts the actor. While in the real brain, a host of little darting thoughts have streamed out, like bees into a midsummer day, with the flying scent of the sun-warmed garden. They come and go, deposit their sweet burden, fly off again to drain the fragrant flower-cups, and all of this is to be expressed in substantives, epithets, verbs. It is too idiotic! To think that writers have not got nearer to life than that!

But of one thing I am heartily glad. The beloved Chris is at least having a time of wholesome rapture. Everything is to his mind. He is sampling a perfectly new set of personalities; and personalities which are really living, not trying to find elaborate reasons why they live. His parsons, parsons' wives, farmers, labourers, are like heatherbells to a voracious bee who has been condemned hitherto to forage among bean-fields and clover.

I regard this all as a sort of convalescence. The question is what Chris is to do when he is *well*. He isn't a student, he isn't really a writer. He is an honest courtier at his worst, and at his best a moral healer. He will find

something of the healing kind to do in the Cotswolds, no doubt, but the problems will be too simple for his very flexible mind. Unfortunately our own lot here are past healing. They are permanent fixtures in a rest-cure; and there is certainly no reason why Chris should take up the rôle of a fashionable nerve-doctor. I don't mean that our maladies are not serious—they are chronic, deadly, torturing, but incurable; and there's no reason for Chris to become a sort of bromide.

I really can't conceive what he is going to do. It is a ghastly comment on the way that material civilisation has outrun moral expansiveness. *Nous sommes tous condamnés*—incapable of useful work or rational enjoyment; but I never realised *how* incapable, till the master-spirit slipped away, and the whole great card-house fluttered and slid to the ground.

(15)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris charges me very urgently to say just what I thought of the bit of writing he sent me. It is to be part of a book, he says, about the simple life. It consists, apparently, of impressions of the country, the talk of goats (as Dr. Johnson said), reflections of embarrassed persons obviously aware that they have not anything in particular to converse about, the vague researches of well-dressed people in the direction of a still more vague religion. It doesn't read to me like the work of a man who has lived in the country, but like the work of a man who has discovered the country. Of course it has pretty descriptions and touches, and it would anyhow interest me, for the simple reason that Chris wrote it. But a book of this kind ought to be a bird-like, darting thing, fluttering and fleeting; and Chris's book has no life of its own—at least it has about as much as one of those big orange-rimmed hazel-coloured slugs, that one sees in a cabbage-bed, whose progress is inferred rather than perceived. It welters rather fatly along.

I don't tell him this, of course. I don't want to discourage the boy in green. But the soft luscious procession of graceful, conventional sentences is in strange contrast with Chris's own light, crisp, gently-hazarded talk, full of whimsical phrases and subtle ironies and pathetic cadences, like the clear chromatic notes of a robin.

But I said what I could—it was easy enough to find things one could praise—but I told him that his work suffered from too much amenity, was too much rose-scented and sunset-hued; and that he had not got the ruthlessness of the artist. I told him that it seemed to me the confession of a sensitive spirit in conflict with reality; he had tried first to mould reality, and found he could create nothing out of base materials; and so he had fled from it, and was trying to disguise the fact, like an elderly and self-respecting gentleman becoming suddenly absorbed in admiring the view, because he doesn't want to exchange salutations with a disreputable acquaintance on the other side of the street.

But the stuff has really confirmed my worst suspicions. Someone in *Faust* (I think) says that sin is not the yielding to sharp temptation —that is easily forgiven—but the ceasing to strive. Inertia, contented indolence, that is damnation—the loss of elasticity, the loss of

sorrow and vexation, the being sure of God's mercy.

Chris is certainly very happy, so happy that he won't care twopence for my little ironies; he will only think it is all the natural biliousness of a town-dweller, who hasn't the energy to escape.

"Renunciation"—a word so disgracefully misinterpreted and misused by Christian preachers—isn't the mere cutting off of hand or foot because they are graceful and flexible and strong, or starving the appetite for music and art because they lend the spirit the wings of the morning. It is a much more rational thing than that; it is the orderly apportionment of time and work and leisure and money because one otherwise hankers after more things than one can grasp. Renunciation is a thing which every sensible and kindly man and woman practises every day, in overcoming lazy and luxurious impulses for the sake of those whom they love.

And the point of it is that it *must* be done for love, not from a sense of duty; and with a settled and ardent aim.

Chris hasn't renounced anything. He is like the priest who hates dining out, and makes it his penance for Lent to refuse invitations.

Am I perhaps exaggerating? I don't say that Chris has embarked culpably on inertia yet.

I look upon what he is doing as a festival that he has earned. But he must keep his freedom, and resist the spell of the arbour of drowsiness, where the pilgrim's staff drops from the languid hand.

Confound Chris's writing; I am suffering from the infection of its mellow richness. That is the mischief of it, that he can write, but can't get his delightful self down on paper, only his delicate and slumberous charm.

(16)

[Gray's Inn.]

Here is a little event! It seems that Lady Jane and Mrs. Ascham, by dint of pathetic entreaties, and arch innuendoes, and various kinds of feminine blackmail, actually *saw* Chris last Wednesday. They went down to the Bethunes, those rather poky friends of Jane's, to whom she was always "hoping" to pay a visit. They gave Chris no quarter. He had to go over to dine, and Jane said he might, of course, come in his woodland dress. Old Bethune is a retired solicitor, who won't even become a J.P. because he is afraid of being consulted on points of law, which would lower his self-respect. Mrs. Bethune, a good-natured, gullible woman, great at "smoothing down" people; and a strapping daughter who does most of the gardening, and is like the daughters of the plough in the *Princess*:

"Huge women blowzed with health and wind and rain;"

I have met all three of them in town before now.

Of course like all gallant men, when there was no escape Chris was tenderly courteous, and made

out that it was the one thing he had been hoping for, but had hardly dared to anticipate.

Jane says that he turned up very spick-and-span, and looking better than she had ever seen him. Mrs. Bethune was very tactful, and said that he was already known in the district as the curate's friend, and that it was hoped he might become a lay reader. Mr. Bethune cleared his throat a good deal, and spoke of baronets by their surnames—which Lady Jane says is a very delicate social nuance indeed. The daughter of the plough stared unashamed.

Of course Chris had them all on toast in ten minutes. Mrs. Bethune was gaily called the uncrowned queen of the rural deanery—a little coarse, but Chris knew his game. Mr. Bethune was addressed as "Sir," which led to complacent musings all the next day as to whether he was thought to be a retired Colonel—"a remarkably well-mannered young man!" The daughter of toil had some equally atrocious compliment; and Chris talked half the evening about the natural courtesy and genial bonhomie of all the countryside, behaviour which he somehow contrived to imply was modelled directly on the demeanour of the Bethunes. "In anyone else," says Jane, "it would have seemed insincere."

Then next day it was arranged that Jane and Mrs. A. and Mrs. Bethune should motor over to

Charters for tea. Mr. B. had business, but would run over by himself later on. The blowzed one's claims were not even considered.

They went; and by some diplomatic arrangements—Mrs. B. and Mrs. A. being constituted inspectors of Chris's domestic arrangements, and taken round by the housekeeper—Chris wanted their *candid* advice—Jane had him to herself for an hour.

And of course Chris triumphed. He hadn't forgotten anyone, Jane said, and seemed to have been *always* thinking about us *all*. It was wonderful. He felt a good deal lost without us, she was sure; and his new-found health and happiness—"Chris always makes the best of everything"—were the surest proof how much he had needed the change. "Our range of talk, our unsophisticated ways, our high standard—not exactly of intellect but of mental alertness—had been a strain to him, and he had felt that he must draw nearer to the heart of things. . . ."

"Did he *tell* you all this?" I said. "If he did, I will never speak to him again."

"Well, not exactly," said Lady J., "but I had thought it out beforehand, and felt very sure what he was feeling; and every word he said confirmed it—but of course he was too modest—as he always was—to speak of himself. I elicited it with my questions."

"Telepathy, in fact," I said. "I believe you mesmerised him—you always had a marked effect upon him."

"Well, perhaps a little!" said Lady J.

"Did he talk about Gladys?" I said.

"Very little, and so gently! I am afraid he feels her silence very much. She tells me she daren't even write to him."

"I suppose he could break the silence if he liked?"

"Oh, but he wouldn't do that! He is so considerate."

"He is full of guile, you mean."

"Oh, don't say that," said Lady Jane. "You quite hurt me."

There is nothing to be done. Chris can create a background of approval and applause for all he does, without knowing that he creates it. He hypnotises people unconsciously. He doesn't know that they are obedient, he only thinks them wise and sincere and kind. When I criticise him sharply, he only thinks it is pretty Fanny's way. He can't get away from the echo of his own temperament, and inspires, without being aware of it, the message which he recognises as the voice of God. *Ex ore infantium*, he modestly accepts his own approval of himself.

(17)

[Gray's Inn.]

I HAVE been very stupid! I got so vexed by Chris's imperturbable jubilant rhapsodies about scenery and quaint types of people, and all his solitary raptures and ecstasies that I wrote him one of those unfortunate letters which I am afraid my friends know too well. I get excited, and my pen runs away with me; and all the time I think I am doing something deft and light-of-touch and humorous; and it is like the caresses of a lobster!

But what made it worse is that Gladys has been fool enough—there is no other word for it, though I love her even more helplessly for it—to think she could put things straight by a talk, and by suggesting that *she* should retire from the world. The poor dear imagined, I believe, that it was her presence and unrestrained adoration of Chris that might have driven him away from London; it is probably old Jane's fault; she can't keep her hands off Gladys just now.

Anyhow, the poor girl, in some tortured and sleepless vigil—I know only too well the grotesque solutions of difficulties that dart into the

mind about the time that one's room begins to glimmer, between the darkness and the day, and how pat and adroit they seem—must have thought that she could in some way put things right, and define the situation, and disentangle the comedy which had so suddenly turned into a tragedy; and perhaps in her innermost unconscious mind have had a very faint hope that her patience, her distress, her wish to do right might possibly touch Chris—and then Jane and Ella *had* seen him, and that had been natural enough. It wasn't clever perhaps or dignified to conduct a personal raid; but when people want anything as much as that, and when their whole life seems to have gone to pieces for the lack of it, they *can't* be reasonable; "Imagine," she would say to herself, "if any stupid aloofness of mine were just to turn the scale the wrong way!" and they can't believe, especially if they are religious and have been wholly in the sunshine, that Providence is going to be so hard upon them—"surely not *that*?"

Well, she went: and all that I know at present is what she herself has told me. She came to see me this morning at my office, sent in a scribbled note—and I found her looking like a ghost—a blessed ghost! She was very apologetic, but she said she had made a *bad* mistake, and wanted advice at once—could I see her in

the course of the day?—of course I could. I got a quiet table at the Liverpool Street hotel, and there we lunched together.

"I wanted to see you, Jack—you will forgive me rushing you like this, but you might advise something. I have done just the worst thing I could." Then she told me about her visit. "It was madness, of course, and he was very angry; of course he didn't show it—he was as nice as he could be—but I think he almost hated me. Now can anything be done? You won't tell me any lies, I know, and you won't make it harder than it need be."

"I will try not to," I said. "But I don't expect it is so tragic a matter after all—why should it be?"

"What *will* he think of me?"

"Just what you would expect him to think—he's very reasonable."

"Yes, he is—or used to be; I see how annoying it must have been; you mustn't think I don't see that—to send a wire and go rushing down, without even giving him time to say no. It was atrocious; but I wouldn't mind that if I could help him—he needs help."

"Yes, he does—but neither you nor I can give it him."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true."

"Can no one help him?"

"What is there to help? he is well, rich enough, happy."

"But it is all wrong somehow."

"Yes, it is indeed! But no one in the world can give him what he needs, because he needs nothing. That is the difficulty. It always is the difficulty. I want to help you, but I cannot. You would help me if you could, but you cannot."

"You don't want help, Jack?"

"Oh, never mind that—it's beside the point."

"Then there is nothing to be done?"

"Nothing that we can do."

"But you mean that there is *something* that can help?"

"Yes, but it takes its own time."

"Oh, Jack, that's rather clerical, isn't it?"

"Well, we all come up against it some time—the clergyman perhaps oftener than other people."

"Then you mean I have come to the edge?"

"I'm afraid so—but you won't fall over."

"But I can't sit still and do nothing."

"Shall I see him, or write to him?" I said. "I would do anything I could; you know that."

"I'm sure you would—but it all wants just obliterating."

So it went on; and you can imagine what I felt like. I had a vision of Chris sitting reading, and I felt as if I could have thrown his book away, knocked him down, and trampled on him, which would not have helped matters. I ended by saying, "the worst of it is when these things happen to *me*, I can go and do my work—but is there nothing which *you* can do which answers to my work? You mustn't sit still thinking, you mustn't begin praying about it, you mustn't even tell Jane."

"I could go down to Sturmer, to my sister's," she said at last.

"Yes, do that—play with the children—make yourself agreeable. Don't talk about it to anyone: it is going to turn out a very small affair!"

She thanked me—she even said I had done her good. But I hope Providence has not got many more of these pleasant chats in store for me. I am only thankful that I held on, and didn't make an utter fool of myself. She went away like the spirit that left Dante on the rock-bridge, and dived into the flaming pool; and I could do nothing for her. I didn't even dare to ask Chris if I might go down. He would only know that she had given it all away.

I couldn't help wondering what the old gentleman who had been looking at us all the time

over the top of his paper thought of it all. That beautiful girl, in the depths of misery, and my own bulky and prosaic air. Yet if she was on fire, why, so was I.

(18)

[Gray's Inn.]

I FEEL fairly nonplussed. I have thought of fifty plans and dismissed them all. It is useless to write reasonably to Chris, because he is so much more reasonable. It is absurd to write angrily, because there is nothing to be angry about. If one offers a man all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them, and he says, "No thanks," and goes off whistling, there *is* nothing to be done. I ask myself plainly, "Can it be that I want him to go on being as stiff as a poker, in the base hope that what he won't have may possibly be diverted to me?"

No, I am not as bad as that. If I could make him love Gladys, I would. I really want her to have her heart's desire, though Chris's idiocy makes me sick. But neither will I deceive, or try to deceive him into taking the risk of marrying her, because I believe the result would be appalling. Gladys would not be content with the courteous proffer of a little bit of him. He would hate anyone who came between him and life. . . . I'm not sure that he doesn't almost

hate her now. Chris, as regards Gladys, is in the position, so to speak, of having asked someone to tea, who replies, "No, I won't come to tea, but I should like to bring ten of my friends to dinner."

I must wait till he makes a move. I want to do him an injury, and shake him out of his gentle reasonableness. I have never wanted anything so much.

(19)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris has written to me, a simply impossible letter—so painfully kind and considerate.

"*I* can't *understand, my dear Jack, what you are all about. I go to look for a kingdom, and find nothing round me but my father's asses—(forgive me for that, it makes such a nice antithesis)—at all events, I go off with the perfectly harmless and innocent desire to live my own life for a bit, having done nothing but live other people's for a dozen years; and you all behave as if I were a victorious general, with a great army, menacing your security.* Emissaries *keep on arriving. I should love to see them in the ordinary way, but they come half in sorrow, half in anger, as if I had done something disgraceful.*

"*Is it seriously contended that I am to return with my tail between my legs, and ask for another chance? I know I have had a lot of kindness shown me, but I have served faithfully for all I was worth. Your butler, let us say, retires, after having been an honest and willing servant. You*

don't write him a threatening letter and say, 'You have allowed me to become so dependent on you, that it is abominable of you to desert me. Kindly return at once, and all will be forgiven.'

"I don't think you can expect me to do that. Indeed, if you and a few of the rest were not so obviously faithful and affectionate, I should feel as if it were really unfriendly to bully me thus. I don't *feel that. I think it is all well meant; I think you want to save me from myself partly, and partly are genuinely anxious that I should come back. But mayn't I try my little experiment? I have really had rather a hard time of it hitherto, and this is a success as far as it goes. I am better, more clear-headed, more interested, more happy than I have been for a long time. Don't, for lofty and altruistic reasons, try to stir up the mud of my little stagnant pool, because I prefer it, for a time at all events, to your crystal spring.*

"Come down soon, old man, and spend a Sunday. I don't want to do anything hard-hearted —you won't suspect me of that.

"Gladys Holmes was my last visitor, and came unexpected. I should like to have had time to arrange something pleasant for her; it wouldn't, I suppose, be convenable *for her to come and stay with me here alone, but that is what I should like. I couldn't help wondering if you or someone hadn't spoken rather too critically about me? She seemed*

needlessly alarmed. She takes things too seriously, and I don't think she looked well."

When I first read that, I thought it was simply infernal *camouflage*. I said to myself "he *must* know." But I don't think he does. I believe he thinks that Gladys is impulsive and affectionate, but that it is all quieting down into something tranquil and reasonable. "Reasonable!" How I am getting to loathe the word; it used, with "generous," to be the highest compliment I could pay. And now Gladys is all generosity and Chris is all reasonableness, and they are both intolerable.

So we go on. I shall try to get down pretty soon to Charters; and meanwhile I won't harry Chris. I don't see why he should be harried. He is like the man in *Fathers and Sons*, who dreamt in his illness he was a partridge pursued by red dogs. He talks cheerfully to a friend who comes to see him, and then says, "Now I must go back to my red dogs." That is what Chris is saying, and I am not going to increase the pack. Let him sit and sip lemonade if he likes. Why the devil shouldn't he? Why should I or Gladys, or anyone, try to dope it with potato spirit. I won't interfere, and I shall tell Gladys so—or rather, I shall tell her as much as she can bear, poor darling.

(20)

[CHARTERS.]

I AM here at Charters! After reading and re-reading Chris's letter, I felt rather ashamed of myself. In any case, *he* did not mean to quarrel, and good heavens, he has had far more reason to be annoyed with us than we with him. He is a grown-up man; why should he not go where he likes, fall in love with whom he likes, do what he likes? Because he did so much for us, steered us through difficult waters, befriended every one of us in turn, made life a different thing for most of us, what right have we to turn upon him as if he belonged to us, reproach him, arrange his life for him, be vexed if he doesn't come to heel?

He never gave any pledges to us; and so far as I can see, none of us ever did anything for him, except ask him to dinner and so on, knowing that he would make our dull parties delightful; and throw all our troubles and burdens on him. We drank him like champagne; and we had grown so used to having him at our beck

and call, that now we behave as if he had played us false in some way, thrown over his old friends, shirked his duties.

The disposition to abuse Chris is now the only thing which keeps the old set together, I believe! And yet it is an amazing testimony to his lovableness, that so many people should feel so bitterly about it. . . .

I am sitting in his big room, at a writing-table in the window, looking out on the lawn. There is now no sound in this still house, except a faint thumping or chopping from a far-off kitchen window, not unpleasantly suggestive of dinner to come, and the beautiful gurgle and drip of the fountain in the hillside. The little stream is somehow the life of the place; and it is by that road that Undine will make her entrance here, if she ever comes!

Chris has made the house charming and entirely habitable. It is dignified and comfortable. Very little furniture, but whatever you want is somehow at hand. It is as if someone had lived here, and gradually disposed everything to be exactly where it is needed. You have not to be always getting up to fetch things. Chris tells me, by the way, that he slept for a week in each of the three bedrooms, in order that he might see that there was everything at hand that a reasonable person might expect.

The dining-room is panelled, has no pictures, nothing but a table, a sideboard, and a few chairs; there is a sort of parlour, very little used. He lives almost entirely in this big room, with plenty of books and all kinds of stationery and paper, and some big leather armchairs to sit in. All the furniture is plain and solid, and most of it old. There is very little that is decorative, so-called.

The servants are a gardener, Reddaway, who seems to be able to do most things—there is very little gardening to do; he calls us in the mornings, he waits on us at meals; his wife cooks, a most competent woman; and there is a wonderfully pretty young girl, a niece of the housekeeper, who lends a hand. Naturally enough the three are ludicrously and devotedly attached to Chris, and do everything to anticipate his wishes. He talks to them as if they were elderly relations, and does most things for himself. Mrs. Reddaway talked to me about him with tears in her eyes. They were so glad to see me, didn't think Mr. Gascoyne saw enough company, read too much, walked too far, didn't consider his health enough, was too good-natured, let anyone interrupt him when he wanted to write and study; would I find out if he really liked things done as she did them—he never found fault—was there anything I

particularly liked, had I everything I wanted? So she talked, like an anxious mother.

And Chris himself? Well, he is sitting in a big chair reading. He looks extraordinarily well, sunburnt, springy, fresh. I never saw him look like this in London. He dresses carelessly and charmingly. His hair tumbles wavily on his brow, his lips smilingly parted, his hands stronger and finer, with more meaning in them than of old; and his eyes have the same child-like absent look. He seems to me younger in every way. That little puzzled trouble of brow has passed away, and the touch of darkness and heaviness round his eyes.

But he isn't altogether happy somehow. He is rather deprecating, I think; intensely anxious that I should enjoy myself; and though he doesn't approach the subject directly, rather pathetically desirous that his plans should be approved of.

I am not sure that he is making a great success either of his reading or his writing. As for his reading, he hasn't the instinct of mastering a subject—the history at which he works only interests him in so far as it resembles or is contrasted with the present, and as it gives him suggestive and picturesque thoughts. He doesn't want to get to the bottom of things and sift them. He is more like a sportsman, beating a covert for game.

The writing? Well, his book grows, has charm and humour, much prettiness and perception—it may be a success, I think—but it isn't himself a bit. He can't get his humour into it. He is rather ashamed of his humour; he regards it as a commonplace thing useful for talk, like a kind of mint-sauce to freshen up and sweeten a dish; but he doesn't see that his view of life is really the comedian's. He has got a lyric taste for poetry and philosophy, enjoys isolated and beautiful moments and glimpses, but has no idea of connection or systematic theory.

He has made friends to an incredible extent with everyone within reach. He isn't vulgar or dramatic or hearty—he is just his gentle, direct, rather ironical self. He doesn't care twopence for the problems and movements of the countryside, except in so far as they affect individuals. He is interested in everything, zealous about nothing. He never takes a side nor, as far as I can see, has any principles of an *active* kind—they are all *negative*—not to be rude, not to quarrel, not to be cruel, not to be mean, not to be spiteful. But it is all personal; all ethical rather than moral. He is guileless rather than righteous, in fact.

He knows all about the countryside—soil, buildings, fossils, flowers, trees. He seems to

know who everybody is—how they live, what they stand for; and he has very few preferences or prejudices.

He doesn't like the feeling that he is being criticised by his old friends, but he doesn't feel guilty or conscience-stricken. If you tell him how much they miss him, he simply doesn't believe it—he thinks it is a friendly imposture.

He has a vague idea of asking some of our friends down; but he has fallen much in love with his routine and his freedom; and though he is enchanting to me, I don't think he will be sorry when I go.

As to the one thing that matters most—Gladys—he is I think rather terrified and bewildered. He talked to me about her visit, which I think upset him a good deal, because she behaved "as if something tragic had happened"—he doesn't understand what it is all about; "She took the simplest things I said," he said to me, "as if they were deep, significant, calculated. I felt as if there was thunder about." I tried very clumsily to enlighten him. "Did it never strike you," I said to him, "that some of these people might care about you very much?" "Why, of course," he said, "that is just what one hopes will happen!"

"But I mean something a good deal more vivid than that?"

"It can't be much more vivid," he said.

"Something jealous, something consuming—like *Two in the Campagna*, for instance?"

"I don't call that consuming—what I like about that is its spacious, all-embracing rapture."

"There's a good deal of pain about it."

"No, I don't look at love as a thing to get pain from—it's just the other way—it is to be comforted, understood, made the best of, believed in."

"Is there nobody you can't do without, Chris?"

"No; not nobody; there are a good many people I *can* do without, of course! But half a dozen—you, Jane, Gladys, for instance—I should feel very desolate without you."

"Oh, Chris, you don't understand."

"No, old man, I don't think I do. You seem to think that two people ought to want to eat each other almost."

"Yes, that is just what I do mean."

"Then I can't follow you! Isn't that hopelessly transcendental?"

"You may call it by any absurd name you like, but it is there, all the same. It's the hardest of all nuts to crack."

"It's too hard for me, old man, certainly."

"Well," I said, "I don't want to be priggish

—but to give an instance of what I mean, what about the end of Browning's poem 'Too late'? What about the Christian sacrament?"

"Surely that's a metaphor?"

"No, people don't die for a metaphor!"

The conversation languished after this for a little, and no wonder. I think he thought me very fantastic; in the calm air of Chris's mind, everything that is passionate becomes a metaphor, a poetical flight. Perhaps that is why he can't write poetry. He was puzzled and bewildered; but he was not much interested, and hardly at all moved.

(21)

[Charters.]

This morning Chris must needs show me some of his writing. One bit was so *pretty* that I copied it down.

" Don't you know the joy, on a hot day of summer, of turning out of the aisle of some cool stone-scented church, into a winding stairway in the depth of the wall? You ascend deliberately, but a dizziness grows up in the brain as the stair turns and turns. It is dark and echoing inside the turret; then a light glimmers; and presently you pass a loophole in the wall, unglazed, barred with iron. You expect it perhaps to look out upon the buttressed nave and the grassy place of graves; but you have circled and twisted more than you know, and the window looks down upon the tiled roof of a canonical house, with a strip of embowered garden, and grey walls covered with the summer fruit. An old man walks up and down the path, reading in a book. That was a pleasant glimpse. You go higher, and again a light glimmers. You expect this time to see the house

again from a greater height; but no, you have turned again, and see down the long leaded roof of the aisle with the clerestory windows set deep in crumbling ashlar. Higher again you mount, and the next loophole unexpectedly commands the blistered front of the transept itself with its huge rose window of intricate tracery; quite close to you stands a dove in a pierced quatrefoil, with nodding neck and glancing plumage, while beyond you see the green spaces of the precinct, with the black mouldering gate-house, and a far-off view of delicate hills, softly tinted by summer haze. Then a gallery conducts you to the tower staircase; and at each glimmer of light a new scene greets you, or an old scene at a new angle; till at last the oak door creaks upon its hinges, and you are at the tower-top, with its filigree parapet of stone, while the jackdaws fly out clamorously from crocket and pinnacle."

That seems to me so like him! The nearest he gets to humanity is an old man reading a book, well out of reach!

I have got to know him better this time than ever before. He has become more transparent, and consequently more complex, because he is a mass of complexities. In old days this was concealed by an anxious sort of civility, though it didn't seem so, because he always concealed

his arts—but it *was* that. He wanted to be on the best of terms with everyone; but now he has made a hundred new friends. He is charmed with them; but he has no sense of personal relations or responsibilities. I mean that he doesn't want to alter people in any way; he hasn't the smallest desire to *influence* anyone's mind or heart. Almost everyone has that desire in some degree, so much so that one almost takes it for granted; it is as common an instinct as the instinct for fishing—to let down your baited hook into the unknown, and to see the mysterious creatures come and nose it and nibble it, and the float begin to bob. You strike . . . you have got him! But Chris fishes without a hook.

He wants people to be themselves, and to watch them. If someone says wise, fresh, beautiful things, Chris enjoys it, and administers exactly the right potion to make them go on. If a man tends to make a fool of himself, Chris likes him to do so, and feeds his vanity. But the process has nothing cold-blooded or malicious about it. He is warm-hearted, decidedly—he likes to feel welcome.

With myself, I am aware that Chris encourages me to say sharp, critical, slightly unpleasant things. It doesn't make him think worse of the people about whom I speak. We are all iso-

lated phenomena to him. He likes Gladys to be eager and impassioned and humorous at the same time. He likes Jane to be oracular, rather absurd, flustered, because it is characteristic; but he is not heartless. If someone was habitually tactless, recognised it, wanted to cure it, Chris would do his best to help, because the offender's remorse would be characteristic too; but it isn't sympathy exactly, because he doesn't *ultimately* care.

So now, as his pretty simile, which I have quoted, says, he is giving up his lonely tower, and looking out eagerly and delightedly on the world which can't come near him. Why he enjoys his present life more than the old is because things are not so near to him. He hates all proximity. But he doesn't know this. In retrospect he thinks he enjoyed himself in town. We were talking of this yesterday, and he quoted:

"'Somewhat narrow, somewhat slow
Used to seem the ways, the walking; narrow ways are well to tread,
When there's moss beneath the footsteps, honeysuckles overhead.'"

"What an old humbug you are, Chris!"

"I a humbug?" (blushing a little). "You don't mean that?"

"No, you don't take *me* in, my boy; it's yourself you deceive; you are blind, pleasantly blind."

"I don't understand."

"Why, it was just because it wasn't all moss and honeysuckle that you fled."

"Is it a flight to get up in the morning? Is it a flight to catch a train?"

"It may be, of course. It depends upon which of the two you prefer, and which you ought to prefer."

"My dear Jack, you are getting oracular and —wistful!"

"No, Chris! I think of you as the drunken man who felt all round the railings of Grosvenor Square and then burst into tears and said 'They've locked me in.'"

"Ah, Jack, I like that; that's much more in your old manner."

How hopeless it all is! he is quite impervious. His only chance is to *want* someone; he has never wanted anyone, only what they could give him.

(22)

[Charters.]

An excellent talk with Chris last night. He is in just as good form as ever and more fertile, I think, than he used to be. He used in old days to be always spinning ropes out of sand, twisting the dreary rubbish into some semblance of use, so patiently, and heading people off from the personal growling, which except in very skilled hands (like mine, shall I say?) turns leisurely talk to poison.

This was the sort of thing we talked about last night. "Did you ever realise," said Chris, "that underlying most conversations between men, there's a sort of dog-fight going on?"

"And a cat-fight between women, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly—even more certainly!"

"What *is* talk, then?" said I.

"Someone defines it as 'a joint enterprise,'" said Chris.

"Between what, and for what purpose?"

"Minds or spirits, whatever you like to call them. The best conscious part of us, always

trying to come to terms with each other—' the blessed company of all faithful people,' you know."

"Then what does the growling and the fighting?"

"The body perhaps," said Chris, "or perhaps the awful inner self. The body is afraid of having its comforts taken away, being interfered with, being crowded out."

"And the A.I.S.?" I said.

"Ah, who can tell?" said Chris; "perhaps of being disturbed."

"But *you* never growled, old man!" I said.

"Didn't I?" said Chris; "that's just where all you good people are wrong; because I don't want to maul people, you think I love them. Yet I often wish people were dead, and when I am unusually bored, I wish that *I* were dead!"

"But whom did you ever wish dead, Chris?"

"You, for instance," said Chris, smiling; "scores of times."

"You alarm me," I said. "On what sort of occasions?"

"This is rather too much in the style of the confessional," said Chris; "but as I am now only a gifted outsider, I will tell you. When you know that the precise amount of sentiment that you have is the right kind of sentiment, and exactly the right amount: when you know

that your view is the only sensible and right-minded and rational view—that is to say, when your imagination is blind and deaf and complacent. Then I feel on fire within."

"Lay on, old man," I said, "I know what you mean. But what is a bundle of likes and dislikes, of perceptions and selves like me to do?"

"Mistrust your instincts," said Chris, "tread them underfoot, resist Satan—that's because it's easier to do it if you think it is someone else and not your own self—more of a game, you know!"

"And what is the result of it all?"

"Why, that is how we become civilised," said Chris.

"But it is all very slow," I said, "it takes time!"

"*Time!*" said Chris, "yes, indeed—why, one looks at the sea sometimes, grey and bitter, swinging in upon the shingle, and it makes one shudder to think how long that has been going on—the same sea, the same pebbles; but you and I have been at work longer still—before Abraham was; before the mountains were brought forth!"

"But where?" I said; "after all, the mountains are older than Abraham!"

"Oh, never mind where!" said Chris—"you

can ignore the mountains—they are much more elementary."

You remember the old style? Chris half-tentative, half-triumphant; and oneself feeling only like a super, a figure in his dream, because one knows he doesn't care if he persuades one or not.

Presently we were talking about love—human love.

"It's one of the short-cuts," said Chris, "when it is of the right kind—and when it is of the wrong kind it is simply a deplorable delay."

"But why won't you take a short-cut?" I said. "That's rather a leading question, of course, but I want to know."

Chris smiled, and quoted Wordsworth. That's a favourite trick of his. He said:

> "'And many love me, but by none
> Am I enough beloved!'"

"You never give anyone the chance," I said.

"I?" said Chris. "Like Mr. Snevelicci, I love them all!"

I'm not sure he isn't right! We were silent for a little, and the voice of the stream on the lawn came in at the window on the wandering airs, cool and half-scornful like the laughter of a hard-hearted nymph, who will not let herself be wooed.

How did we get on to writing? I don't know.

"It's a language I am trying to learn," said Chris. "Direct little signals to other people wandering in the mist, friendly people wishing they had company—that's how I look at it. "Are you there?" I say; "No, you need not be frightened—I'm quite harmless; I don't want anything of you, except just to join hands" —but the difficulty is that this is just how the most dangerous people begin; and that's the difficulty of the joint enterprise, that you can deceive with words almost more easily than you can tell the truth. What I am trying to learn is how to tell the truth; and that's why you think my writing silly and pretty—it's like the baaing of lambs. . . . Now *you* use your pen in your letters for quite a different purpose, to startle people, to make them jump, to make them wish they hadn't. You are really more civilised than most of them; but you enjoy running and barking like a collie, and seeing the silly fussy creatures melt away in front of you. I don't deny that it's amusing, but it doesn't make them any less sheep! And what I am trying to do is to learn the language of sheep, and of birds, too."

There's no doubt, I think, that Chris has got hold of something bigger than most of us, and that there's a very real purpose behind his

vagaries. I thought at first that he was treating liberty as an end, to use the old tag, not as a means. But now I see that he is on his way through it to something else. I feel I daren't meddle with him, hardly dare ask him any question; and yet I continue to mock him, like the gnat that sings sharply in your ear, and when you flounder and snatch, effaces itself, till you have got still again—and then another thin clarion blows. That's the way I spend my time.

But as to Gladys—my mind always comes back to this—I *don't* see what he is about. If he doesn't understand, he is stupid; if he does, he is cruel. She is too noble a creature to use so.

But perhaps there is something of the huntress queen, after all, about her; some impatient masterful craving. *Must* one detect such things in everyone? Is one *never* quite safe? Well, I wish that instead of pursuing the white hart which bears a charmed life, and vanishes if you turn your head, she would look out, like the old lady in the nursery rhyme, for some of the other duckies who are only too ready to come and be killed!

PART III

(23)

[CHARTERS.]

I AM spending an entire week with Chris, and it has been on the whole a delightful time. We have had one or two tiffs, but they did not amount to much. I said one day that he ought to go up to town some time, for a week or so, and see a few of his old friends. He did not take to the idea, but I could see that my remarks somewhat emphasised a faint scruple of his own.

My point was that he must not allow it to appear that there had been a *breach* of any kind. He admitted this; but he said that he did not care to present himself in an apologetic guise. "I think it would be more natural," he said, "to wait until I am asked. To speak plainly," he went on, "I am not prepared to accept the idea that seems to prevail, that I I have done anything unfriendly. I am trying an experiment, which I had a perfect right to try, and I am living a new kind of life." I begged him to come up nearer Christmas, and spend a week as my guest at Gray's Inn, and he

half promised to come; but it is clear to me that he evidently abhors the idea of the old gatherings and festivities. "It sometimes seems to me," he said, "that I behaved like a mixture of a domestic chaplain and a jester—on the whole a humiliating kind of position."

On the first morning after my arrival, being Sunday, we went to Church. It's a pretty place, with a simple rood-screen, some shocking hot-looking stained glass, rather a dignified Early English chancel, a fine Jacobean monument, and at one side of the chancel, opposite the organ, a sort of chapel or chantry, containing family tombs and a private pew, rather ill-kept in comparison with the Church, which is essentially trim and comfortable, though odorous paraffin lamps, in veneered brass coronas, seem to me to hint an atmosphere more domestic than ecclesiastical.

The Vicar, a bluff, sanguine-complexioned, elderly man, with grizzled hair, read the service in a resonant voice, and preached a sermon on a fine text, "Thou shalt not see my face unless thy brother be with thee." He didn't "recall the scene" or expand the fine story into a flat paraphrase. He just went straight at his subject—brotherliness. The sermon wasn't well put together, but it had points—a certain humour and direct common sense. He said

that Christian people nowadays were friendly enough, but that something more was wanted —the sense that you had some sort of life in common with neighbours, and were not merely parcelled off into family circles, like sheep in pens; and he said that the difference between brothers and friends was that friendship was a thing that could be picked up and dropped, but that brotherhood meant a real kind of link in the background, a responsibility that you could not quite get rid of, however much you would like to shirk it. "Only very heartless and cruel people can really disregard the tie of blood"— he quoted a bit out of *The Mill on the Floss*, where Tulliver goes to see his poverty-stricken sister, which rather brought the water into my eyes.

In the chantry of which I have spoken sat three interesting-looking people: a man of about forty, with an irritable and tormented sort of expression, evidently bored and nervous; he fidgeted about, and his lined brow and puckered eyes gave one a sense of discomfort. By him sat a rather stony and impenetrable woman, as still as her husband (presumably) was restless. She sate motionless, staring at nothing. By her a pleasant-looking girl of about twelve or fourteen, who sate holding her mother's hand in the sermon, while her glancing eyes searched

the congregation for any mildest ray of interest, like a dog sniffing at a gorse-patch.

We stopped for a minute in the Church to look round; as we came out, we saw the Vicar standing in the churchyard with the impatient-looking man. I saw the woman and the little girl crossing the adjoining field by a footpath.

The Vicar waved his hand in greeting, and said: "Mr. Gascoyne, I want to make you acquainted with your neighbour, Squire Bevir, as we call him hereabouts." We raised our hats, Mr. Bevir took his off, and held it in his hand while we shook hands, I being also duly presented.

Mr. Bevir made rather a flustered apology for not having called, to which Chris said smilingly, "Oh, I know already how the days slip away in the country!" Mr. Bevir then apologised for Mrs. Bevir having walked on—she was not very well, and didn't care to stand about. But would we—with a little bow in my direction, so as to include me—so far waive ceremony as to lunch with them on Tuesday? His house was only two miles away. Chris gave me a little glance, and then said that we should be delighted. Mr. Bevir looked relieved, like a man who has got safely through an unpleasant duty, said a few words about the weather with anxious civility, and then with a hasty profusion of nods

and smiles, handshakings and handwavings, apologised again for having to rejoin his wife, and went off with the uneasy look about the back, the tendency to wriggle, which afflicts one when one walks away from a watching group.

As he crossed the churchyard stile, he made another awkward flourish of the hand and hurried away.

"Well, and who exactly *is* Mr. Bevir?" Chris said to the Vicar.

"Rather a rare visitor here," he said. "He is a small squire of the neighbourhood—Scantling Grange—starved-looking sort of house—very appropriate name! It's an old family, and he is lord of the manor here; but it's a poor little property at best. Mrs. Bevir is rather an invalid, and they have one small daughter, Helen, a delightful child, wonderful to relate! He's a testy, nervous creature, quarrelsome, or perhaps resentful, and over-polite. Makes a scene on the bench occasionally—he's a bit of a Radical in a silly fantastic way, and a decidedly unpopular man. But I can't help having a sort of liking for him; it's a pathetic household; he hasn't enough to do; and perhaps he doesn't quite hit it off with his wife; and then . . ." The good Vicar pursed up his lips and nodded significantly—"You can see for yourself how he fills up his time!"

Chris smiled dubiously. "Well, we're in for it now," he said to me—"unless you would like me to make some excuse—there's really no sort of reason why you should be forced to go!"

"Forced to go!" I said. "What—to be asked to lunch by the Lord of a Manor, in the presence of the Vicar, at the Church door? My dear Chris, it's an adventure! To the jaded town-dweller it's positively romantic. Whatever happens, *I* go; and mind, I won't be dragged off again in an hour. I'm going to get a lot out of this. I'll see every inch of Scantling!"

The Vicar shook his head at me and laughed. "You literary men!" he said, "I envy you!"

"My dear sir," I said, "I'm a stockbroker. I shall have to send you one of my circulars! You wealthy pluralists—you are our stand-by."

"By the way, Vicar," said Chris, "I must really thank you for your sermon. You hit the nail on the head a dozen times."

"Well, go and do likewise!" said the Vicar in high good humour.

On the Tuesday we biked to Scantling—Chris keeps a bike for visitors; just like him. A poor little lodge, just a labourer's cottage at the gate, and a belt of rather shabby spruces. An ill-kept drive, but a few fine oaks in a small

park; and then hidden away among trees a pleasant stone manor-house, but with an air of decay. There was a bit of very much neglected garden, straggling laurels, weedy flower-beds. Bevir came out to meet us on the steps, shaky-looking but sprucely dressed, with a flower in his button-hole, very effusive and somehow rather guilty in demeanour, as if we were likely to have heard ill of him. He led us into a distinctly frowsy drawing-room, and the blank-looking wife—handsome in a dilapidated sort of way and very pale, who seemed to be waiting apprehensively for us, greeted us wearily. The little daughter came and shook hands obediently and demurely, saying, "How d'you do?" in a sweet little bird-like treble.

Bevir seemed annoyed with his wife from the first. She led the way into a panelled dining-room with some nice portraits—though the paint was scaling off. We had a good plain lunch, waited on by a clumsy old man, who thrust dishes at one at the height of one's chin and held them grimly, as if one were intended to eat out of the platter.

It was at first rather a nightmare. Mrs. Bevir was incredibly dreary, asked a few questions, paid no heed to the answers, ate little or nothing, with the air of apathetically enduring till all was over. Chris was perfect, of course.

He made the little girl bubble over into sudden laughter by some mild jokes. Bevir himself was very dreadful. He talked in a hectic and extravagant way, wandering from subject to subject, at once blatant and ill at ease. At one moment he was finding fault with the dreariness of the country, and the next he was saying that the air alone of Scantling was worth sixpence a pint, and that he never felt well away from home. He was decidedly offensive to his wife, and apologised for the cooking of a dish—"My wife's too bookish to take any interest in food —either her own or other people's!" He paid no attention to me till he gathered I was a stockbroker, and then he was rather unpleasantly jocular. "You might put me into a good thing or two, I daresay, if you chose. We poor country squires have to look after the main chance."

But Chris somehow or other made an excellent job of it. Bevir told a curious story about a labourer who dug up a pot of guineas, and what he did with them. Chris steered him into telling us something about local traditions, and even extracted a smile at some familiar old story from the disconsolate Madame. We sat awhile afterwards, sipped some extraordinarily fine old port, and Bevir, after repeated refusals on our part, sheepishly finished the decanter. We drifted into the drawing-room, and Chris

got deeply involved with little Helen over a fairy-book on the sofa, while I drew Bevir's fire. We walked round the place, and pretty wretched it was. There was a fine old gabled stable-court, with tiles slipping from the roof, the cupola awry, willow-herb growing all over the little yard, except for some trodden paths like rabbit-runs! Below the house was a tangled bit of woodland, with a stream, choked with fallen trees, weltering into an unwholesome sort of marsh. We looked in at a small farm, where Bevir hectored a farmer's wife in his worst fashion.

Finally we got away, rather flushed and weary, with infinite protestations from Bevir; while Mrs. Bevir seemed to be relapsing into a racking nervous headache. The only pretty thing about our departure was the thrusting of a curly head from an upper window, and a clear voice which fluted, "Come again soon, Mr. Gascoyne, and the other gentleman, only I don't know his name."

We biked slowly away. "There's a bad kettle of fish," said Chris. "It really is enough to make one's heart bleed to think of that jolly little girl growing up there, and that poor scared mother—what does she think of when she wakes up in the early morning and hears the rain on the window?—and that chattering cad

grumbling and cursing about the place. What a devilish place the world is, in corners; and yet a decent couple with some nice boys and girls here might be almost in heaven!" After that he was silent, and I didn't feel like saying anything.

(24)

[Charters.]

We had an interesting talk yesterday about Chris's plan of work—what Mrs. Reddaway, with a finer precision, calls "studying." His writing may hop away by itself! I don't interfere with that, except to throw dust in the air, just to brace him up a little.

He has a sense, I gather, of the desirability of *looking into* things—"that must be looked into next," he says. He has, I find to my surprise, a respect for knowledge, whereas I am rather sceptical about it. His theory is something like this. In science, he says, all the big discoveries have been made by investigating everything, and some of the meanest phenomena, like the biography and habits of gnats and rats, have yielded the most far-reaching results. Much of this investigation has led nowhere: but after all it is done with, and need not be gone into again.

In the same way, he thinks that if human records are looked into, it may be possible to discover something about the mental and moral habits of the human race. He thinks we are

on the brink of great discoveries in psychology; and that just as many physical diseases have been traced to their source, and more or less eradicated by science, so we may find out how to deal with mental obliquities and moral poisons.

But our discussion raged about minor issues. My theory is that art, music, literature are valuable only in so far as they appeal to and ultimately help to civilise human hearts and minds; and of course there are some big performances in the past like Greek literature and sculpture, Gothic architecture and so forth, which retain an apparently permanent appeal.

But what is commonly called erudition seems to me impossible to justify—to use up, let me say, the trained faculties of acute minds in arriving at the correct text of some masterpieces, or worse still, of some entirely second-rate author of antiquity, appears to my mind a pure waste. None of the subtlest and most brilliant conjectures of scholars have ever really affected the literary value of an ancient masterpiece—it is only the replacing of a few dropped threads, and the clearing up of old breakage. And then there are the heart-rending instances of men of first-rate ability spending literally years in tracing to their source anonymous quotations in well-known books, like Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*—not one of which discoveries affects

the weight or the argument of the book in the least degree. I call that simply the most deplorable kind of waste. This Chris won't admit.

I maintain that all second-rate human performances had better go into limbo and stay there; and that it isn't much use to rake in prehistoric middens, unless we can make the old life useful to the new.

Chris, on the other hand, maintains that you can't be of direct use to humanity by anything you say or write, unless you have some idea which way the human spirit is moving and heading. He is trying to get an insight into history; he is going on to "look into" religion.

I daresay it won't do him any particular harm. It is perhaps better, I tell him, than endlessly hanging over gates to interrupt honest labourers who are hoeing, or dancing attendance at vicarage tea-parties; "but perhaps," I say, "these are all psychological investigations?"

"Something like it," says Chris.

"I should have thought that the only excuse for such things was a genuine love of human nature?"

"I think it's better than making fun of human nature."

"But that's psychological too! I am sure my mental processes are worth more than many sparrows."

"Oh, I've looked into *them*, old man," says Chris. "You have been classified long ago, pinned to a cork with wings extended!"

"But," I protested, "you are behaving as if you were going to live five or six hundred years!"

"Well, time is only a dimension—it's the pace that matters."

"You're in a great hurry, Chris!"

"Yes, I have lost a lot of time!"

I'm getting quite good at Boswellising Chris, I find; but one can't Boswellise the lazy affectionate smile that winds into one's heart; how incredible it is to be so lovable, and to have so much love to give away, yet never to love. That's the unintelligible thing about Chris, that he thinks his own affection is worth so little, and throws it about in handfuls, like Austrian bank-notes. You know that they keep up one-crown notes still in Austria, which are worth far less than even the paper they are printed on, just to give away to beggars? That's like Chris. Nor has he ever found out that it is actually more delightful to be flouted, mocked, derided, tormented, by one whom one really loves, than to be held at arm's length with uniform goodwill.

(25)

[Gray's Inn.]

It is three weeks since I left Charters. Ever since I got back I have been so busy that I have hardly known where to turn. I have been trying to get some of our friends to invite Chris to stay with them in town. It seems unkind to break in upon his little arrangements, but I think the danger is of Charters becoming like the house of Circe, perilously sweet:

> "Where that Ææan isle forgets the main."

Chris mustn't be allowed to forget the main! But I have come round several points in his favour. The thing is doing him good and he enjoys it—what more can one want? I agree with Ruskin that the most important thing in the world is to be innocently happy, if you can.

But I don't want it to be the *end* of his career. I have a feeling that there is something big ahead of him. I thought at first that it was all a fanciful experiment, the mere whim of a man who had been living a life he didn't much care about, and working rather hard at petty things

without any particular result, except to feel that, like a court official, he had taken a good deal of trouble off the shoulders of some rather idle person, and had been ceaselessly occupied in amusing people who hadn't earned the right to their enjoyments. I thought that he had drifted into this from not having anything definite that he wanted to do. I still don't much believe in his writing, because, as I have said before, it isn't *him*, only a very small part of him—the same quality, in fact, that made him smooth the pillows of his comfortable friends; and his writing is an exhortation to be at ease in Zion, addressed to people who are decidedly too much at their ease already!

But the seeing more of Chris, and the process of looking more closely into his mind and heart, has taught me something about him and a good deal about myself.

About him—that there is something truly large, generous and noble in him, which is really at variance with the ugly and stupid side of human things, with the dreadful power, whatever it is [there seem to be so many powers about] which makes people content to go grubbing on like pigs in a sty, grunting, gobbling, foot in trough, pushing against each other, screaming for food, sleeping on the dirty straw, waking up and beginning all over again.

I don't say that the world is all like that—God forbid—there are work, love, courage, patience, devotion—plenty of fine things in unexpected corners—but still there is also a good lot of the grubby side, and much more than there need be. The fact that our old set were well-dressed, well-behaved, genial, amusing, rather covered up the fact—for me at least—that it *was* rather a low affair. Take Northover, for instance—what an idle, snappish, self-centred, ugly business his life is, always discontented, always rather insolent, always angrily trying to manufacture pleasure, "the desperate simplicity of the wanton," as the fine chapter-heading in the Book of Proverbs says.

And in the same heading there are a few words which fit Chris exactly; "a sincere and kind familiarity with wisdom"—what fun it must have been to get *that* written down! That is what Chris is after, and he is not very far off it.

Then I would like to add what it has taught me about myself, just for the sake of seeing a faint reflection of what Chris is in a somewhat tarnished mirror.

I have had my work, thank God; and my excursions into society have been interludes—and as such, I am not ashamed to say—highly entertaining. But I see that I have got into a

way of treating everything jauntily and smartly, and it doesn't do. I don't mean to abandon the practice of mild humour, the right, as Leslie Stephen said, to damn everybody's eyes occasionally—but what with wealth in the background, and the full-flavoured jests of the Stock Exchange, and the fact that most of our friends, whatever their faults, have a real sense of humour, the whole thing has been of the fizzing and sputtering order; and I have a craving for serene and wholesome domesticities!

Now Chris can get this in solitude, because he is essentially genial, though not gregarious, while I am neither. If Chris sees three strangers talking and laughing together, he wants to join them, be told the joke, and have a laugh, too. I want to fly in the opposite direction, reflecting what an offensive thing other people's laughter is. In fact, Chris has all the common graces, with one exception, that he is too much pleased with everybody in general to want anybody in particular.

I think he has done well and wisely to cut himself adrift. And now he has got to go one step further, and find someone indispensable, or to find someone to whom he is indispensable.

Perhaps his book will succeed—but fame is as unsubstantial fare as scenery; both are things for which your heart aches when you haven't

got them, but when you have, you can't do much with them. You can't peruse newspaper cuttings, and you can't sit and stare at a view. The scenery that nurtures the spirit is the sudden glimpse you get, after long mental drought, of something cool, freshly-coloured, finely-modelled, peaceable, health-suggesting—such things as mountains, lakes, a hamlet among trees, a brimming chalk-stream—or better still a human face that makes a frank signal of amity, a welcoming hand.

(26)

[Gray's Inn.]

There has been a curious sequel to the Bevir episode! There doesn't seem to be much use in Chris trying to escape from the envious contact of humanity; he attracts the avid spirit, the floundering and submerged soul, as the dying camel does the vultures. . . .

It seems that Bevir has had some sort of attack—I can guess what—and being in the vale of misery, he decided to use Chris as a, well—no, it's not to be so lightly written of! I had discerned in Bevir a desperate man—a man who had begun life, I expect, with vague ideas, fleeting visions—a man of some perception and intellect, but utterly wayward and undisciplined.

Through what early mud he waded I can also guess; and he came out with a good deal of it sticking to him. Then he had nothing definite to do—his father died while he was at Oxford—he came home to an elderly and weak-minded mother, who encouraged him to do nothing. He did nothing, with the usual result. I don't

suppose he was a naturally evil person—I think he was sentimental, romantic, excitable, and entirely weak; then when he was about thirty he seems to have really fallen in love. Mrs. Bevir was the daughter of a clergyman, a beautiful girl, rather puritanical, and very guileless. She saw, no doubt, that Bevir needed to be rescued. Anyhow, she married him at the age of twenty-two, being also very much in love; she didn't get on well with Bevir's old mother, who was querulous and interfering, and couldn't bear to see anyone come in between herself and her boy; and eventually Bevir seems to have lost patience, and to have insisted on his mother leaving the Grange, and going to live in a small house of his, about two miles away; and there she lives still, idolising Bevir, firmly persuaded that Mrs. Bevir plotted against her, and got her turned out. She never goes near Scantling, but Bevir, to do him credit, has been good about going to see her. Mrs. Bevir, junior, has never done more than pay an occasional visit to her mother-in-law, and I daresay the interviews are fully as pleasant as can be imagined between two rather definite-minded women, each of whom believes that the other has brought about Bevir's downfall. The little girl is the only living child; a boy born some years ago died as an infant, and Mrs.

Bevir has never got over it—thinks it a judgment.

Till this child died, Mrs. Bevir managed to keep Bevir in fairly good order; and he really made a good start—took to farming, did a little county work. But since the boy died, she seems to have abandoned herself to anger and despair, has kept the little girl as much to herself as she can—and altogether has behaved as a good, puritanical, clean-minded woman can behave, with no mercy.

The result of this is, that Bevir has become intolerable—he made, I gather, some miserable attempts to comfort and conciliate his wife; but he has no patience or courtesy—he is a bully and yet a sensitive man; and I expect that they have both had a horrible time.

Now Bevir has had this last beastly smash—he was nipping all day long. He won't have his wife to look after him, but his old nurse, who lives in the village, has been installed; and the mother comes over every day.

But the wretched man seems to have gone through a perfect hell of anguish about everything. He persuaded the Vicar, who hates anything disorderly and grubby, and has been perhaps a little stern with him, to beg Chris to go and see him. Bevir is not ungrateful to the Vicar, but says plainly he wants the advice of

an impersonal man, and doesn't approve of confession. "Ah, I see," says the Vicar, "you want to produce a few selections from your experience, and to present your case to an outsider." But he's a kind-hearted old boy, and not really stuffy, and he *did* persuade Chris to go, telling him all the story, or as much as he knows.

Well, Chris went over, and had a bad time—but I can see he is grimly and disinterestedly interested in the case. "The man's a nasty brute," he says, "but it's *real*! He lies there, thin, haggard, bloodshot, a beastly spectacle—trying to read, to do business, to sleep, and seven devils (at the very least) hauling on him. He's frightened of dying, he's frightened of coming back to life, he dreads seeing his wife, he won't see his daughter, he remembers things. But," says Chris, "he isn't in the least degree what I call repentant. He wishes he hadn't got into such a mess, he wants to be comfortable in body, and easy in mind; but he doesn't see what a hideous business it has all been, or what a filthy and cancerous bit of the world's tissue he has become. One doesn't know where to begin. It's of no use calling him names—he takes that like a lamb. It's usual to say that one ought to hate the sin and love the sinner. I can't do either. I don't think I hate sin any

more than I hate typhoid fever or the law of gravity—it's a bad current, no doubt; but I don't trace any personal enmity in it. If I thought God could prevent it and doesn't, I could hate God. But I don't. There seems to me to be a real duality behind—an inert downward-tending force of death and disease, of evil and sorrow; and a fresh, light-scattering wholesome impulse as well. The evil doesn't seem to me to have an active spirit behind it at all—it is like a noxious viscous fluid, helplessly filtering in where it can.

"But the fresh, light-bringing, courageous force seems to me to have a real personality—but it's all rather hazy—and I mustn't be metaphysical."

Chris appears to have been trying to disentangle the situation. First of all, the drink is cut off; and here there comes in a real difficulty, for what the wretched creature wants, when the craving is on him ["the craving *does* look more like a personal devil," says Chris, "smiling, winking, jogging the unhappy man's elbow all the time"] is someone to amuse him, etc. But the mother's only idea is to read a book called *The Near and Heavenly Horizons*—"about as refreshing," says Chris, "as a gallon of warm water with a spoonful of treacle in it"—and the old nurse, who seems a dear old soul, can

only bring him some of his childish story-books, which are as soothing as red-hot skewers—happy memories stabbing and fizzling into the brain. But mother Bevir can play piquet, and that is the way out.

Secondly, so says Chris, the wretch is intolerable about his wife. He does appear to be fond of her, in a fashion. But she has wounded his vanity—I expect she can say scarifying things; so Chris is to interview Mrs. Bevir, and that joy is still ahead of him. But Bevir puts all his "peccadilloes" (that is his amiable description of them—the diversions of an adult ourang-outang) down to her. She discouraged him, he moans, she repulsed him, she derided his promises, she turned her back on his tears —"I have positively wept before her, wept and sobbed—I, a man of experience and serious interests, a grown-up man humbling myself before her, laying bare my contrition before her stony-hearted gaze"—that is *his* account, carefully compiled for the benefit of Chris no doubt, and with a certain literary complacency; it seems to me to be the sort of stuff one makes up in sleepless hours, when one feels rather noble, and thinks everyone else hostile and maliciously intent.

In fact, Bevir, it seems, has got the conspiracy delusion rather badly—not an open conspiracy

to hound him out of the county, but a *Vehmgericht* of people who encourage him to drink, provoke him at petty sessions, suborn neighbours not to call upon him. "Left to myself," he says, "I could have overcome or despised these machinations—but with my wife indifferent, and with a ring of secret foes, what chance have I?" Chris said that he tried to persuade the poor creature that it was all nonsense, and that it wasn't worth anyone's while to take this infinity of trouble for no particular purpose—but that this was such a wound to Bevir's vanity that Chris had to give it up. "Indeed," said Chris, "the one thing that seems to sustain Bevir is the sense of romantic importance which comes from being the centre of all these hidden activities." Chris says that it is useless to argue—"the necessity which Bevir feels, of rebutting all arguments, only consolidates the case in a logical manner in his mind."

(27)

[Gray's Inn.]

Bevir is better; but now it seems that Chris has got Mrs. Bevir on his hands. She asked the other day if she might see him, and added that she was particularly anxious that Bevir should not hear of it—it would only upset him. The end of it was that Chris, who hates all clandestine affairs and Nicodemite proceedings, had to take the Vicar into confidence, who brought Mrs. Bevir over to Charters, and effaced himself, while Chris and Mrs. Bevir had an interview in the library.

Chris writes:

"I can't describe to you what a harrowing business it was! She came in with the dignity which belongs to a really tragic situation; and I can't repeat to you what she told me. We have misjudged her completely and entirely. She is not, as I certainly supposed, a woman made helpless and apathetic by a vain, egotistical, filthy-minded and bullying husband. She is a noble-minded woman of deep moral fastidiousness, who

has sacrificed again and again her own most sacred instincts to try and keep the brute's affections. She began by saying that he was really a man of fine perceptions and higher impulses, ruined by a careless bringing-up and a strong animal nature. She still believes in him; but for years back any attempt to revive the old tie has been met by repulsive advances. 'I could not even attempt to express to you,' she said, 'how he interprets my deep desire to regain his confidence, but you can perhaps imagine. And then I have had to see him coming to depend more and more upon every degrading source of oblivion; and yet I believe that in his own way he has been true to me—and it is that which has made him feel ill-used—that I have nothing, as he says, to reproach him with!'

"Then there has been the terror about the little girl. 'I have had to keep her away from him as far as I can, for when he is overcome, there isn't anything he may not say. And yet I don't doubt that he is deeply attached to her—and my efforts to guard her have been another cause of deep offence.'

"Mrs. Bevir has, of course, often thought of leaving him—but apart from the publicity of it, and the lack of any relations of her own that could intervene, and the fact that she has no means of her own, have all utterly hampered her—and worst of all, if the matter could be brought to a

legal issue, there seems to be nothing definite which would give her freedom, or entitle her to deprive him of the custody of the little girl. And what between her desire to help him, and her determination to keep the child, there has been no way out.

"'Of course,' she said, 'I blame myself for not being able to win him back—and I have given up all hope of doing so. But if you knew what my attempts have always ended in! and yet in spite of all that he has done, I do not *believe him to be a deliberately bad man.'*

"The reason why she consulted me is, she says, because she feels she can trust me, and because the child likes me; and because I am, it appears, the only person who for some years back seems to have won Bevir's respect or regard. He feels, it appears, that the Vicar—who has evidently done his best to be of use—despises him; but he thinks that I should understand him. I don't think," adds Chris grimly, *"that any human being has ever suffered more through having a sneaking sort of politeness than I have done."*

There's the situation—and Chris says that when after an hour of tragic talk she took her leave, she said that she was sure—she felt instinctively—that he could help her, and that no one else could.

So our poor Chris is in a fix—he has jumped

from the very cultivated frying-pan into the entirely uncivilised fire. He loathes Bevir—"one of the most disgusting, pretentious, false spirits I have ever encountered." He is half repelled by Mrs. Bevir, but has a very great compassion for her; and he is rather devoted to the little girl—he has the strongest paternal feelings about children, I know.

If Chris were a sentimental person, he would be deeply moved by all this. If he were a professional philanthropist, he would enjoy the case. But I think that though he means to do what he can, from some curious sense of duty, he isn't personally moved by it in any real degree. It is an entirely unpleasant interruption to his serenity and his carefully laid plans. Yet it is impossible to call him either selfish or hard-hearted, for he has done ten times as much already as I or anyone else would dream of doing. I should have flown out at Bevir, and given him a good broadside, which would have made things worse than ever. But then I am not the sort of person who would have been confided in, and Chris is.

Meanwhile poor Chris pays two or three pastoral visits to Bevir a week, and is more bored than horrified. Chris has no fear of filth at all, owing to the fact that he hasn't the smallest affinity for it. Probably Mrs. Bevir arranges

further interviews; and two or three times Chris has had the little girl down to Charters, and without spoiling her or being silly about her, has no doubt devoted as much trouble to entertaining her as would have won the heart of many a fair lady. Chris is very remarkable with children; he does not, as a poet or a sentimentalist would, concern himself with how much one can learn from them. He seems to care more how much he can teach them!

Did you ever hear of such a *macédoine* of tragedy and sentiment; and wonderful to relate, Chris enjoys in a way the *comedy* of Bevir; he says he is a fine blend of Quilp and Pecksniff —in fact, he remarks that Bevir is the only man he has ever seen who instinctively and naturally illustrates Pecksniff's view that there is nothing *personal* about morality.

(28)

[Gray's Inn.]

Here's a fine business! The atrocious Bevir has decided to die. What with the deprivation of stimulants, and his injured feelings, and the deep pathos of his situation, he had an attack of heart-failure yesterday, after an attempt to get up and dress. *Nous aurons des larmes!* He seems to have forgiven everyone—Mrs. Bevir for her coldness, the child for her infant frivolity, the nurse for not making stronger beef-tea, his mother for indulging him too much, Chris for not being more practical. The thought that he might be going to die made him feel for once on the top of everything, made him pity everyone—"he knew," he said, "what a legacy of grief he would leave behind if he did not sacrifice his own feelings." The Vicar did not arrive in time to be forgiven; the doctor was blamed, but still pardoned; and then he actually did die.

I ought not to write like this, perhaps; but the unhappy Bevir, I regret to say, has been daily becoming to me more and more of a comic figure, his high-mindedness has been increasing at such an alarming rate.

"I really can't waste powder and shot upon Bevir," writes Chris. *"If we had been on a desert island, I think I should have felt it my duty to compass his end as painlessly as possible. But when I reflect upon his career, and think of the combination of circumstances and temperament, I can't acquit Providence of arranging a farce of a most tragic kind. The mixture of moral obliquity, entire insensibility to all decent considerations, lively imagination, deep self-pity, frantic vanity, and theatrical piety is really a devilish conception.*

"Yet he has not done any widespread harm. He has been a bad landlord, and a ridiculous figure generally; but his old nurse adores him, his mother thinks him a mixture of a hero and a saint, his daughter is a perfect darling, and his wife, who has really seen through him, though she is now transported with grief, is far too fine a creature to collapse. Indeed, I am perfectly certain that she will get over it, because she has never lost a scrap of her idealism, or her innate purity of mind. She will, I believe, be ultimately a really happy woman; and even now, though she blames herself morbidly, she must wake up each morning with a real passion of relief. Indeed, I can see that it is so.

"She sent for me, said a few words of splendid gratitude; I offered my services, but she said there was nothing I could do. I had done every-

thing, she said, that a human being could do, and she could only feel that they had taken a most unfair advantage of my kindness—' though that,' she said, ' makes it all the more incredibly generous.'

" I think," says Chris, " that I shall now efface myself " ; and the long and short of it is that he is coming up to town to stay with me for a little, and to " make his peace," he says, with the old gang. We shall see !

He adds a few sentences :

" This amazing and portentous experience has already become unreal to me. What is this extraordinary place we are living in, the world which used to seem so straightforward and commonplace ? What sort of a mind is behind it all ? Is it really trying to do something for us, to show us something worth seeing—or is it simply amusing itself, horribly and heartlessly, at our expense ? Are our intelligence and perception, our emotions and passions, just given us that we may enact these incredible dramas with enough vitality and eagerness to make them worth looking on at ? I seem to have touched the two extremes of life, the ultimate possibilities at either end, in Bevir and his wife. And to have shut the two up together for a dozen years, is, to say the least, a startling piece of imagination ; and then that a lovely flower, like little Helen, should grow out of it all,

as out of a dunghill among the ruins of an abbey-choir—this is the one thing which makes me believe that in spite of the sickening side of it, there is *something almost impossibly and inconceivably beautiful in the background of it all.*"

(29)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris has arrived here, very brown and upright, like a soldier from a campaign. It is wonderful what a physical improvement has taken place in him. He has decidedly suffered

"A sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

It's even true of him that—

"Those are pearls that were his eyes."

There is a serene luminosity about his look that is new—it's more obvious in London. But he looks as if he had been through something of a strain, a little fine-drawn.

I am asking the Northovers to meet him at dinner, because they will be disagreeable anyhow, and still more so if they are not asked at once—they are "*this* instant" people, both of them. Then Jane shall come, and I think I shall ask Gladys, and get it over. It's an ill-assorted party, a sort of Seidlitz powder affair; but I propose to be amused. Then we shall have an easier time.

Chris and I had a *tête-à-tête* last night, and he filled up some details about the Bevir affair.

He wasn't there at the end, but he saw B. the day before. He says that B. seemed to him to be rather "fey." He didn't think then that he was going to die; but he knew that he very nearly had died, and he said to Chris, "By God, it's an easier thing than I had expected! It was almost pleasant, like a hot bath: I felt quite calm and collected—but then I'm always at my very best in a crisis—it's the little things that upset me." He said, "I was almost sorry when I woke up again, and saw the old room and the tiresome things going on." Then he said suddenly, "I wonder where we go to? Do you think there is anything at all over there? Do you think we meet people, recognise them, pass the time of day and all that?"

"What did you say to him?" I said to Chris.

"Oh, I tried to put him off—but he wouldn't be put off. So at last I said that I didn't think we probably remembered anything at all, but that *ourselves* were left, and that we probably began again somewhere."

"'What they call "reincarnation?"' said Bevir, musing. 'No, I don't think it can be that.'

"'Of course,' I said, 'it is only my idea, but I can't believe that we cease to exist.'

"'Begin again as somebody else?' said Bevir. 'No, I don't like that. I can't believe that. I might find myself quite a common person.'

"'You would never be that!' I said. It was no use arguing with him—indeed he would not understand it if one did. He brightened up at the compliment.

"'Ah, you are beginning to see that?' he said."

Presently Chris went on with the story. "It's all nonsense, I expect, old man," he said, "to believe that people are frightened or repentant when they come to die, unless they have formed the habit of being frightened or repentant in their lives. They are just themselves, whittled down to the smallest point. Bevir had never had any morality. He had been frightened by his illness, yet even then he only did what his nature told him was the right and impressive thing to do. But he had always lived from hand to mouth, and he doesn't know what repentance means. He had no wish to be different—he only wanted not to be inconvenienced. And now he was tired out, like a child that is tired of play—and he was just his old egotistical, absurd, unpleasant, undignified self, without a thought of anyone else. Why should he think that his wife would be suffering? He wouldn't have suffered if she had died—he would only have thought how inconvenient it was.

"He was nice to his mother and his old nurse—they went out and left us together. 'Poor dears!' he said, 'they would miss me very much!' Then he said, 'Would *you* have missed me?' It wasn't an easy question to answer—it was just like a child's question."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, I lied," said Chris; "I said that he had interested me, but that of course I hadn't known him very long." He was quite satisfied; he lay there looking an awful ruffian, but feeling interesting. He said, 'How little people have understood me! I never had a chance of putting out my powers.' Then he dozed off, and I left him."

"It's a sordid affair!" I said.

"It is," said Chris, "but not wholly lacking in interest—it's real, anyhow. Bevir has done something quite definite at last!"

"The strange thing," I said, "is that death gives even the wretched Bevir some species of dignity—that is what I rather grudge!"

"I grudge him nothing," said Chris. "He never did anyone any good—except that he gave his wife that child—and he caused an extraordinary amount of pain and disgust. But he is wiped out; and I can't say that it was all exactly his fault either. Yet he seems to me wholly unalterable—there has been nothing to

build on except his vanity. It entirely beats me. Where does it all come from? Such trouble taken to make a man both ridiculous and noxious. It is too hard a nut to crack! Don't let us talk about it any more."

(30)

[Gray's Inn.]

I find Chris very restless. He writes a letter or two, he reads a little—but to-day he has mostly ranged about and revisited his old haunts. He seems to shrink from seeing the elect ladies. He made careful inquiries about all the small things that had been happening, Marcia's engagement, Simpson's promotion in the F.O., etc. You would have supposed he was going to prepare orations—perhaps he was—we shall see to-morrow. But he came in from his perambulations in good spirits. "It's such fun to be a *revenant*," he said; "and to see the old haunts with no fear about them, no entanglements, only associations.

"'I am of yesterday,'

and I can't tell you what fun it is to think of Charters waiting for me; and that I haven't got to tramp about this vast city (which I find unusually interesting) any more, except as a curious visitor. I'm glad I have come up

here, old man. It is comely and reviving to feel happy in a place where you have been miserable."

"Not *miserable*, Chris!" I said.

"Yes, old boy, wretched beyond the power of words to describe!"

(31)

[Gray's Inn.]

My little dinner was not an entire success, though it ended well. Chris seemed to me a trifle nervous beforehand.

Gladys arrived first, on purpose no doubt; and I effaced myself on some excuse, so that she had five minutes' talk with Chris before the others came; and this was satisfactory, I think; for when I came back they were talking in the old way, Chris with a touch of added sedateness, and Gladys with a slightly strained intentness —like someone looking from a window on to a moonlit lawn—as if anxious to realise Chris's presence to the full: and I had that momentary sense of annoyance with Chris that I have had before. I used to think he didn't see: but he sees fast enough; the annoyance is that he can confront, so unmoved, the wonderful grace and beauty of Gladys and its tacit appeal. And I am not ashamed to say that I do take comfort from the fact that he shows no sign of yielding. I don't think that is base? If hers were a mere attempt to capture him for her own satis-

faction, I should rejoice in Chris's indifference. But it isn't that—she doesn't want to force his hand, she doesn't want his consent; she wants *him*—and whatever happened to him, if he were disfigured or disgraced, she would feel just the same about him—another of the triumphant *coups* of the ironical Master of human fate.

Then came the Northovers: she with that undulating walk that means mischief—or at least means that she hopes for some fun; it's the snake-like element coming out in her, the gliding snake with head erect and flickering tongue, vigilant, ready to strike: and Northover himself behind, lounging in with that infernal air of being an undeniable and unquestioned part of the embodied power of the world, dryly civil, but prepared, if we others did our humble best, to deign to be amused—if he chose! They really are rather an infernal pair, their complacent and condescending civility so horribly strong and imperturbable.

"Ah, Chris, glad to meet you again—long time since we saw you; and you're looking very fit, too!" says Northover.

"I hear you have all kinds of adventures, Chris," chimes in Lady N., "sentimental adventures, chivalrous adventures—Galahad in a shooting-jacket!"

"You'd hardly reckon them adventures,"

said Chris. "The only difference is that one doesn't see them coming, down in the country. But there isn't so much difference as you would expect. People are much the same everywhere!"

"But more sincere, I expect," said Lady N.

"No, I think not," said Chris; "only a little less sophisticated."

"That means being rather cleverer than one likes?" said Lady N.

"No, only behaving as if one were cleverer than one really is," said Chris.

"Ah," said Lady N. with one of her provoking smiles, "I see you are cultivating a rural frankness, Chris. But it becomes you. Everything does!"

Chris made a little bow. And then, fortunately, Jane came trotting in, took both Chris's hands and would not let them go. "Oh, Chris, this is really nice."

"Isn't it?" said Northover. "The return of the native. But we mustn't let our emotions overpower us, Jane!"

"Oh, I must have my little scene!" said Jane. "It's only the old hen, welcoming back her duckling from the pond."

"Well, we'll all look the other way if you like," said Northover. Whereupon the gallant Jane, in a mood of reckless exultation, made an elderly bob at Chris, and kissed him on the

cheek. I thought for a moment that Chris would have swollen or fallen down dead suddenly. But he only blushed a little and looked pleased.

"Come one, come all," said Northover.

"You are making it vulgar," said Lady N.

I felt it was time to intervene, and piloted the party in to dinner.

We began to talk about Charters.

"Hullo," said Northover suddenly, "it seems that my dear wife and I are the only people who haven't been down to Charters. How did *you* get there, Gladys?"

"I went by train," said Gladys, "and came back by train."

"Urgent business?" said Northover.

"Very urgent," said Chris, intervening. "I wanted immediate advice about some rugs. Gladys came to my help."

"Convenient things, rugs!" said Northover.

"Yes," said Chris, looking at him fixedly, "they don't hold dirt!"

This was, I felt, sailing a good deal too near the wind. However, Lady N. must needs inquire, with an irritating kind of titter, exactly what Chris *did* at Charters.

"Prayer and fasting," said Chris. "I look up disputed texts, and meditate about religious liberty."

"Very funny, to be sure," said Northover.

"Not very," said Chris. "I can do better than that—it's too elaborate. Humour is a thing one ought not to be conscious of—it ought to be just there, ready to brim over—it oughtn't to be cultivated."

"No," said I, rather in desperation. "Someone says you ought to live within your wit, just as you live within your income—humour ought to be rather inarticulate!"

"They say that no Jews have humour," said Jane with a pensive air.

The remark saved us. We were all, I think, getting just a little ashamed of ourselves. We discussed all the Semites we knew, and Lady N. neatly clipped up the severed arteries. After this all went well, but it was a narrow shave.

The old habits began to assert themselves and the old cordiality to revive. Chris began to work wonders, and made—how *does* he do it?—everyone think better of themselves. Gladys came out of her shell, and N. retired into his, as he always does when the meat is in him, if he is kept amused.

The triumphant climax was reached when N. as he went away said, rather shamefacedly, "It is really great fun to have you back, Chris. Don't go too far with the prayer and fasting down there!"

(32)

[Gray's Inn.]

After that first anxious encounter, all has gone well. Chris took command again, and we disputed for him, as we are assured that the Archangel and Satan disputed over the body of Moses.

One curious thing happened. I came back to tea one night, and Chris hadn't returned. So I sate reading. When he came in he looked somewhat excited and decidedly pleased.

"I've been to tea with Gladys," said he.

"I suspected it, old boy."

"Jack, it's all right, we have come to an understanding."

This gave me rather a turn. "Oh, heavens!" I said.

"The right kind of understanding," said Chris; "mutual respect and regard—no nonsense."

"Oh, that's all very well for you," I said. "but what about *her*?"

"It's just what she had been hoping."

"Oh, I daresay!" I said, "the end of the

roly-poly—that's what all women profess to like. It means so much to them."

"I think you do her a great injustice," said Chris. "She began by apologising for her 'intrusion.' I said, 'How could I be anything but pleased by anything so spontaneously friendly?' Then I explained my theories to her. I said that the secret of happiness must lie in enjoying what one has to do, and that, in London, I had lost my enjoyment. I said that much company destroyed all one's uninterrupted illusions about oneself—one's indefinite, unattested nobility, one's interest and pathos."

"When anyone who wasn't a sophist would just say it damaged one's self-respect?"

"That's about it," said Chris, "but she likes things to be pitched rather high."

"Oh, Chris, your divine stupidity!" I said.

Chris reddened slightly. "Well," he went on hurriedly, "I said it was getting a great bore to be always analysing and explaining and translating nature and poetry, and I wanted just to enjoy it for a bit, and fulfil my destiny in solitude. That I wanted to lay in a stock of beautiful impressions, unconsciously—and pick them to pieces afterwards. That I wanted more room and fewer duties, and liberty to think and feel and do just what I desired—that I wanted air

in fact—and that one could only do one thing at a time."

"That was rather a homely finish," I said, "you seem to have let yourself down rather."

"Oh, you ought always to have a vernacular termination."

"Oh, Chris," I said, "your kindness and consideration are most irritating. Of course poor Gladys will accept any terms—but you are offered a gift—a priceless gift—a bottle of the sparkling wine of life, and a delightful woman to sit and talk to you while you drink it. And you say that you prefer to go home to have a cup of tea. You are really almost tragic!"

"Not at all," said Chris. "I don't want a bemused Titania, or an infatuated Desdemona."

"Of course," I said, "Helen of Troy and Cleopatra are not quite up to your mark. They leave your Highness cold. Go into a nunnery, my dear boy. The sister superior—that's about your mark."

"What about living within your wit?" said Chris. "This is Faust and Mephistopheles over again."

"No, no," I said, "it's being Laertes when you might be Hamlet. Have some human weakness, Chris."

"You mean that I am a prig?" said Chris.

"I wish you were," I said. "Then you

would hold out your sceptre and grant a boon, for the sake of others' happiness. It's your d—d reasonableness that I am afraid of. You don't want to be convinced, only to convince. Admit the possibility of your being mistaken, and I will forgive you."

Chris shook his head. "You know you are talking nonsense, old man," he said. "If my reasonableness is d—d, your disinterestedness is much more d—d."

He had me there, I admit—and I said no more. And now he is going back to his cup of tea; and I sit desiring the golden waters of life. It's a topsyturvy business at best.

Chris went off yesterday, hung with trophies. "How I hate *presents*," he said to me.

"Chris," I said, "your Puritanism will be your destruction!"

"Why, Jack!" he said as the train slid away. "After you!"

(33)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris's visit here has done both good and harm. As far as he is concerned, his absence, and then his return for a bit, have at last brought home to our more idiotic friends that he has a right to live how and where he likes. The former feeling about him, that his case resembled that of the absconding club-secretary, enriched by defalcation at the expense of the club, has disappeared: there is a slight sentimental resentment apparent that he should have been so ready to throw over his old comrades, while Jane bewails him frankly as an enthusiastic disciple might bewail the promotion of Elijah the prophet—"When he was with us, our inspiration seemed to revive," she says.

But it has done harm in the sense that we realise now how much we depended on Chris, and how fortuitous a concourse we are without him.

His own tact was admirable all through—I never admired anyone more! He had things

said to him, quite unconsciously, which would have made me writhe. The suggestion conveyed to him was that his ideal of solitude is mere moonshine, a whimsical, fantastic, irrational experiment, which must be a screen for some real reason. It was even hinted to him that he must be much *richer* than we had been led to suppose. But Chris never displayed the smallest irritability, nor seemed to regard any comment as being in any way impertinent—"his gentleness is almost undignified," sighed Jane one day, "it is very nearly spiritless." But I myself could see that it was a fine self-control. If I had acted like Chris, and had then been exposed to such comments, I should have been furious. But he treats it all as one might treat the irresponsible chatter of children. Once or twice, to me, he let himself go a little. He said to me one evening, after a dinner: "It's really been rather a revelation to me to see our old friends, after the daily habit of familiarity has been suspended—they are so much more elementary than I thought!—it seems to me to account," he went on, "for people's ideas about heaven and hell—the future and the past viewed by entirely commonplace minds, the future—the beatific vision—arrayed in terms of bourgeois comfort; the past regarded as fatally irreparable. These good people appear to me

now so stationary. They live without growth and without hope. They can't think of themselves as different, or with any probability of improvement. And it never occurs to them that they can possibly be mistaken in any judgment whatever. Even the fact that they have altered their minds on many points does not give them the smallest suspicion that their present feelings may undergo a change. It is imagination, after all, which differentiates people —not morality, not perception, not common sense. Ascham, for instance," he went on, "has entirely altered his view about politics—he used to have a rather timid and shamefaced Liberalism. I have heard him go so far as to say that it was as well to try to convince people of the need of legislation before legislating. Now he is an uncompromising Tory. I attacked him about this, and he said: "Ah, but then I hadn't all the data." "But you have now?" I said. "Oh yes, I have been into it all pretty thoroughly since then."

Chris went on to say that he had a better opinion of people's kindness and loyalty than formerly—"I fully thought they would have forgotten me long before this"—but a much lower opinion of their intelligence and perception. "I find myself wondering if they ever see or hear anything except what they expect

to see and hear. Their mental processes are simply the meek acceptance of experts' opinion. Their last resort is to mention the name of a Bishop or a Cabinet Minister. And the worst of it all is that if a man is an accredited expert in one subject, they accept his opinion as valuable, if not final, in all other subjects. Mrs. Ascham would adopt any artistic or religious heresy if it were backed by a peer; and a Duke's opinion would be worth more than a Viscount's, unless the Viscount were of a very old family indeed. But she isn't snobbish; she is only reverent. She doesn't want to claim acquaintance with exalted persons—but their recorded phrases are to her like the voices of angels announcing blessings. In old days people believed in angels as the messengers of God; now they believe in experts or men of high rank. 'Such opportunities of gaining experience,' she says, 'and think of the influence they wield!' Oh, Jack, I feel unhappy about it all," said Chris. "I feel as I should if I went back to some village I had lived in, and found that the shrewd old labourers I knew had been converted by some magician into scarecrows!"

Chris will never come back: and he leaves me sick at heart, yearning for his blessed company, his *présence et précieux concours*. My opinion of him, as a gentleman and a Christian,

has gone up ten points—and it was high enough before. He is too good to live—yet he is less of a prig than ever. He has *no* wish to enforce his ideas; indeed though he judges us severely, he never compares us unfavourably with himself. His patience and his modesty are angelic. He listens as attentively; he does not strive or cry. The bruised reed, the smoking flax—he leaves them gently to their fate, because he has learnt the fine lesson, which I have never learnt, that you can't make anything of people by slating them, or showing them up, or manifesting your righteous wrath, or impressing upon them your own impeccability—but only by making them think better of themselves—for most people are *au fond* humble enough, if you can get past the conventional complacency—and by giving them some sense of the beautiful element in life, being kind, accessible, attainable, and not by being remote and arduous and harsh. It is this immense power of Chris's which I want to see used—and, good heavens, how often has he poured his alabaster box of perfume out over our misshapen and ungainly feet! That power will be used—it *is* used wherever he goes. I look upon him, to quote the old text, as "a messenger . . . an interpreter, one among a thousand, *to show unto man his uprightness*"—not to convince men scowlingly of

sin and stupidity—anyone can do that—but to show us poor creatures that there is a seed of goodness and beauty in most of us, if only we can clear a little room for it, and give it space to grow.

(34)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris has settled down to work, he tells me, with an intense and grateful relief. One thing I am thankful for, that the pathetic Mrs. Bevir, and the dangerous little *charmeuse*, Helen—" I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden "—for Chris, that is to say—have gone off somewhere, so he won't be harried at Charters.

I insert a bit of one of his letters—I often wonder what my indiscreet young typist thinks of these extraordinary extracts. The last she copied for me aroused her curiosity. I found her regarding me with a half-amused speculation, when she laid it on my table!

" Old man, I have come back to inconceivable happiness. I am all alone and shall be, I hope, for some weeks. I never saw the little house so intimately dear—it seemed glad to have me back, glad to enfold me. The Reddaways regard me as though I had emerged from the whale's belly. I awake in the morning with songs of praise. I can understand the frame of mind in which Bishop

Ken, in his reedy old voice, used to sing 'Awake, my soul, and with the sun,' with his own lute accompaniment, as part of his daily orisons. I go to bed, only jealous of the drowsy hours that separate me from life. I walk far afield, and feel that my head must dart out rays, like Moses returning from the mount (depicted, by the way, in the church here as resembling the explosion of a high-pressure bomb!)

"I say idiotic things to tillers of the soil. I feed alike on wide views from grassy ridges, or narrow vignettes from deep-cut country lanes.

"And while I sit at home, wrestling with Maitland on Court Rolls, my heart makes a descant, like an organ-player enriching with harmony a clumsy and sombre plain-song.

"I must tell you of one little place I found, where the valley of Adcaster—a remote place—runs out into the plain near Toddington. I gather from the books that there was a lake there once, and that a certain squire, hearing of the draining of Whittlesea Mere, and the rich land discovered, set to work to drain the lake, by channels and outfalls. But he did not realise that it had a chalky bottom, the denudation of countless centuries from the down above. When he had drained it, nothing whatever would grow there but light-soil plants and tussocky grass. So he made a lot

of cress-beds and cut down half of the old wood, full of gnarled ashes and alders, that had screened the lake. Then he found it didn't pay, and left it to itself. It is now all grown over with thorn-thickets and hawthorn and wild rose. The cress-beds are full of rich luscious water-plants; the water comes spouting up from a dozen great freshets, each like a crystal boss on the pool-surface, and a full stream pours away. The bit of old wood is enchanting, and stands in the centre, so that you wander round with a continual sense of mystery. There are flowers everywhere, birds sing shrill in the wood—the place is all alive with birds.

"And then the little green plain where it lies is embraced on either side by the low wolds, sinking gradually towards the plain, while to the east the valley folds in among the hills, the spire of Ad-caster just visible at the wold foot. Westwards there is nothing but the great plain running down towards Winchcombe, with two or three isolated hillocks, covered with copses—islands once, no doubt.

"There was not a soul in sight to-day, except one or two old labourers hoeing slowly in a patch of arable land.

"My heart didn't leap up, as it does sometimes —it remained suspended, like a hovering hawk. There was a tone, rich and full, of colour and poetry in the air; the rough grass, the odd-shaped grey-

trunked trees, the gushing waters, the far horizon, the gold-edged piles of cloud, all blended together into a mood that seemed to me almost perilous—as if some vital organ of perception within me might break for very sweetness.

"Sometimes one seems to be turning out one's feelings all day long—an almost emetic effect—but to-day there was something high, sustained, joyful, which gave me an idea of how life could be lived, and out of what simple sights and sounds heaven could be constructed, if only the heart was pure and free within.

"Forgive this rhapsody! Since I got home I have been working quietly—and my own little stream utters its monotonous song, and fills the house with its artless music. Art, indeed! What a profanation! contemplation like that is the essence of life, and needs no reminders!"

I think this is all very charming as well as quite sincerely felt—but is it substantial enough? What about the dry times and the hours of *accidie*?

(35)

[Gray's Inn.]

As I half expected, Chris has had a little relapse, a touch of nerves. It is just as I feared. As in the case of the old man in the nursery rhyme, the birds of the air have begun building nests in his beard. He feels birdlike himself; in his last letter to me he quoted the delicious verse of Job, "I am a brother unto dragons, and a companion unto owls." I knew that the mood of sublime exaltation could not last, and now comes the spiritual dryness.

The fact is Chris is trying to be a Carthusian; the Carthusians are not monks, but gregarious hermits; they each have a little house and garden, so contrived that no inmate by any possibility can be within eyeshot or earshot of any other inmate. When they go to church—which they do far oftener than even I should like—they walk ten paces apart, with their cowls pulled over their eyes. This is called the *custodia oculorum*. They only talk once a week for two hours with their brethren, and this conversation is fondly called recreation. They

pray, read, dig, work at handicrafts in their narrow little houses, and when they die, they are buried in the cloister garth. The Order had, I gather, in the course of time, so many cases of mental derangement and even suicide, that they now watch their novices very carefully, and if any of them show signs of depression, out they go. A venerable retired Archbishop, some time ago, discovered a vocation, and entered as a novice; six weeks later, after an interview with the Superior, a fly was ordered, and the Archbishop left by the 3.15 for London, a rejected candidate.

I have seen two of their monasteries—one in ruins, but very nearly perfect; up at Mount Grace in Yorkshire, a lovely scene, the oak-copses coming steeply down the hills for five hundred feet, and the beautiful old place lying tucked away in a combe, with a stream running through, on the edge of the rich plain. It seemed a place where any reasonable human being could be happy.

But I also saw a modern one in full activity —a huge place! A sombre muffled bell was ringing, and the monks' procession passed us going to church, in their white stuffy-looking habits. They looked to me pale, stout, frightened men; and at the end came such a neat little rosy priest, in secular dress, buckled

shoes, etc., stepping delicately—a novice, I gathered. I didn't want him to be converted into one of these bulky prisoners. They say they are very happy; I don't know about that —I wonder what they do, or what they think they are doing! It's a very expensive affair, keeping up a big place like that, though their food and dress are simple enough. That all seems to me the very last refinement of religious dilettanteism. Why not live alone at Upper Tooting, if it comes to that?

I suppose there are a number of people in the world who find it an immense relief to have absolutely no responsibilities and whose minds run naturally in devotional channels. But I am sure it is abnormal, or rather, uncommon: and I doubt if it can be done except on a mystical basis—by which I mean a definite sense of some actual Divine presence—as real as the perception which some people have of the presence of an unseen cat, or of thunder brewing.

Anyhow, I don't think Chris is of that sort. Solitude might be practised successfully by a very fastidious man with fine mental qualities, who really found the talk of ordinary people insufferably tedious, and hadn't the prodigious appetite which I have, for instance, for the smallest characteristic details of anyone's life and habits. Such a man might, if he had a

taste both for study and also for nature, do it enjoyably and successfully for a bit, provided that he took a dose of society occasionally to relieve his bile, and to demonstrate to himself afresh how very tiresome other people are.

Of course if I lived alone in the country, I should be consumed with curiosity to know who lived in every house, what their pursuits and incomes were, what they ate and drank, what their clothes were, what had made all the lines in their faces. I shouldn't want to meet them all often, of course, but I should like to make sure about them.

But Chris is not fastidious; he is perceptive, yet he is as much interested in the people who are failures as in those who are successes. He has charity; he finds it difficult to hate anyone whom he knows. He has a vein of indolent pleasantry about him which makes him incapable of being vexed, except by intentional insolence. The reason why so many people fall in love with Chris, is because he is really interested in them. He has heard more confessions than most priests; he has conferred many unconscious absolutions, "Neither do I condemn thee!" and then "run away, dear!"

Now Chris has got a relapse. He is like Hamlet—he finds the sky a pestilent collection of vapours, and all the rest of it. Here's a scrap:

" I find that a mood of incredible flatness has fallen upon me. Are these brownish fields, these rough pastures, with the soft-edged stone walls, really my beloved Cotswolds? These little mellow houses—what kind of a stuffy life is hidden away behind those mullioned gable-windows? These toilworn, shapeless figures, plodding along the lanes, are these the pleasures of the plains? Is the blowsy girl, whom I heard giggling among the hawthorn-thickets yesterday, a happy nymph? These Manor-rolls and Court-leets that I am reading about, all concerned with bygone, dirty, unemphatic, prejudiced persons, are they the brave and breezy documents of the ancient world?

" I'm not very bad, as you can see, my dear Jack, for I can jest about it. But a few days ago, I broke out of uneasy dreams at some dim grey hour of the night, in a mood of desperate blackness and remorseful self-contempt for having banged the door upon a band of good-natured old comrades, whose good-will and kindly regard I shall never regain, in order to shut myself up in a stone house in the bleak country, with the fields full of scarecrows, and a book to read as full of mental microbes as a mouldy cheese. . . .

" Of course when I was up and dressed and had had breakfast, I knew it was all stuff—not quite *all, perhaps, for if depression gives you a stab, it*

is *through a weak place in the armour, though it tips the dart with its own private poison.*

" Do you remember the grim story of the man who made his way into the secret treasure-chamber, lit by the solitary ruby in the ceiling, with the brazen automaton erect below, mute and passionless, with the arrow laid upon his slackened bow, and how the seeker went hither and thither, and at length laid hands upon the mighty gem that was the glory of the place—and even as he plucked it from the socket, he saw the metal arm drawn back, and the bowstring plucked taut, and the bolt launched with a hideous clang, only to crash into the high-set ruby, plunging the vault in the darkness of death ?

" I think that is an allegory of the melancholy darkness which falls upon the stricken soul in the moment of its triumph, just when it dreams of wresting from life the secret of energy and joy."

I shall feel rather anxious about Chris for some time. These moods may be just a normal and passing reaction—but they may come when the nature of a man is strained by ecstasy, following on long endurance and activity, even to the snapping of some vital chord, which can only be repaired by the cessation of all tyrannous emotion, the rest which melancholy imposes on the spirit by the bitter tonic of mental pain ; but I must not give way to what is the worst

of all the phenomena of depression, the contagious infection which it spreads among those who are nearest to the sufferer, and would help him if they could, if he did not instinctively reject their sympathy and poison its vital sources.

(36)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris is all right again, I think. He tells me now that he has had turns of this sort before, but had put it down to the London life and the lack of exercise. He says it is essentially a bodily not a mental malady—that he is always conscious, behind it all, that he does not *think* differently, only *feels* differently.

"*I thought,*" he says, "*that doing more or less what I liked and enjoyed would remove it; but I now see it is the other way. I think that enjoying one's life and every hour of the day very much is a strain to the organs of joy; and I believe, too, that the depression is a well-meaning provision on the part of nature to enable one to recover balance. But the better way of avoiding it is perhaps to have a certain amount to do every day that one does* not *enjoy, and which has to be done by a combination of intellect and will; and so the emotions get a rest. That is the worst part of a writer's life, that it leaves so much of one's time unoccupied.*

"The fact is, that we are each of us a much more complicated machine than we feel. Like a piano kept in a damp room, or boots stored on a high shelf, we have all a tendency to mildew; while like a piano used all day and every day, or boots worn constantly, we have also a tendency to wear out; so that life is a compromise between denudation and disintegration."

Chris thinks now of taking up a piece of dry, definite scientific study—scientific in method, that is. And he is going to work at prose-rhythm. He says that there seems to be a rhythmical beat in well-considered and calculated prose, obvious in the Psalms for instance, less obvious in writers like Ruskin or Pater, still less in Carlyle or Macaulay, and in dry, logical, unemphatic books hardly to be detected at all. He is not quite certain that it is not a pot-pourri of distinctly poetical rhythms. And he means to do some dissecting—that is to say, taking some specimens of various kinds of prose and assigning metrical stresses. Counting trochees and anapæsts, he thinks, will be wholesome discipline.

The thing has never been really attempted, he thinks. The one or two writers who have begun, have done the dissection, but merely left

the pieces lying about. I think this all very sensible.

Moreover, he thinks that he has rather used himself up with very long walks and bicycle-rides, and is going to try moderation.

(37)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris seems to be settling back comfortably into his old routine, "avoiding raptures," he says, "which savour perilously of mental instability." What he wants, he says, is a Wordsworthian rapture, not too extreme for little bits of homely pride and vanity, critically conscious of food and drink, capable of small irritabilities, not wandering "lonely as a cloud" before the heedless breath of the Spirit. "*I have been reading* Hamlet, *to see if my ecstasies have anything to do with duties neglected or needful cleansings deferred; but I can't think of anyone else who needs to be withdrawn, like myself, from human contact—though there are no doubt a good many useless persons about; and I have also been reading Henry More, who, though a practising don, lived a life, for months together, of abstract felicity, hardly able to contain his joy.*"

But Chris isn't a mystic—he is not conscious of supernormal presences; all his messages come to him from sights and sounds, smiling

eyes and parted lips—confound him, why cannot he come a little closer?

Here is a pretty bit out of his letters—and yet it makes me feel further away from him. It is true he writes delightfully about it—but that's just to add a sprinkling of sugar to the dish, not from any *need* to share his joy with me or anyone.

"The stream that leaps into the stone trough under the hill, and hurries glistening through my lawn, is becoming every day a more personal presence to me. I sit beside it, I dip my hands into it to feel its pure caresses; I watch it in its runnel plaiting itself into liquid wefts; and its voice is like the voice of a spirit; sometimes, on dull and cloudy days, it is like the murmur of a mournful litany, consoling itself for a half-forgotten wrong; on fresh bright days, it has a triumphant note, as of one hastening, over-brimmed with joy, to some delightful business; on days of storm and rain it seems to sob hoarsely, full of baffled passion. When I awake on calm nights, I hear it laughing delicately under moon and stars; in the morning it bids me rise betimes to take up the beloved task of living; or when I seek my bed, with my brain full to the brim of racing ideas and images, it persuades me to dip the fevered mind in sleep.

"I must beware of letting the Neckan, or what-

ever she is, come too close to me; she would like to bear me down, struggling no more, into the seaward passage of the crystal flood. . . .

"This is all too rhapsodical, old man! perhaps even a little falsetto; but it isn't a mere idle fancy. There is something appealing, persuasive, soulless, and yet almost holy about the clear element that runs, like a moving jewel, in its half-hidden channel. It has the charm of Ariel—petulant, smoothly-moulded, delicate Ariel, who sickens at the leering regard of the gross masters he is forced to serve."

I wonder what was in the mind of Chris when he wrote the last sentence? It rather pierces my heart, for it makes me feel as though, like the sedate Prospero, half-stoical, half-cynical, working out such prosaic effects by such airy agencies, we have been using Chris himself to run on our clumsy errands, and bidding him sing his beautiful unimpassioned heart-whole songs to a crew of low-minded adventurers.

Beautiful Ariel—let him go to his cowslip-bells and his dusk-flickering bats, and enjoy himself in his own way! But I mustn't write in this euphuistic style; I am becoming a *poseur* in my middle-age. The ingenuous maddening Chris has cast a spell upon us, scattering

roses, and tenderly wondering that we prick ourselves with their thorns, and then going his way with the calm serenity of one who can't be persuaded or bought or wooed.

You know the way in which if you throw a crust of bread into a pool, it is ringed round by a host of nibbling minnows, bobbing and starting and sliding this way and that, as the silver-flashing swarm prevails. That is what we are all doing with him; but the crust at least diminishes—while Chris remains intact and obliging, whatever one does!

PART IV

(38)

[Gray's Inn.]

I HEAR very little from Chris nowadays. I gathered from Jane—Chris would never make so positive a statement—that he really wanted to be left alone for a little at his lodge in a garden of cucumbers. His letters begin to rarefy. Not so many, not so long, not so personal; they become bodiless, descriptive, annalistic, no criticism of life, no lively emphasis. As on an obliterated coin, his head becomes a mere silvery silhouette.

But I am myself a little alarmed. There is so little motion on the surface that I suspect there is a strong current below—but what, and whither?

Facts. (1) His book, called *The Delectable Mountains*, is just about to appear. It will probably be a success with the wrong sort of people, by which I mean the people who mistake indolent irresponsibility for rest—rest implies, or ought to imply, a relief from labour.

It will be said, I fear, in reviews, that it is " the harvest of a quiet eye," and by enthusiastic readers that every word has the effect of a benediction.

(2) Freddy, who looked in at Charters in the course of a motor-trip, told me that Chris gave him and Milner lunch, and " burbled away like anything." Freddy, who has a shrewd eye for character, added to me that he didn't take much stock in Chris's smile: " It is the sort of smile you put on when you are much bored, but when you have got so good a game of your own on, that you don't mind being bored." When I said, " What sort of a game do you mean ? " Freddy chanted with virulent emphasis what I imagine are the words of a popular ditty, " When the right girl comes along." This was vulgar and not convincing, because Freddy's imagination, though lively, is rather conventional. But one can never be sure with Chris that somebody won't symbolise something, and there *may* be an Egeria; and as in the case with the catechist in *Kidnapped*, hearing the young people their religion may be a great temptation.

(3) He is certainly giving the Bevirlet lessons of some kind. She comes down to Charters two or three days a week; and he is trying the Socratic method. I couldn't help thinking of

Edward Irving and little Jane Welsh; but I daresay it is only Alice in Wonderland after all.

The long and short of it is that I feel like the anxious mother who said, "Go and find out what Tommy is doing, and tell him not to." You see, Chris has got an active mind, and great personal charm, and loves relations and understandings with people, so long as they are not polluted by any stronger sense of physical attraction than you might feel for a Madonna of Bellini or a singing angel of Luca della Robbia.

I wish I could get a first-hand account, from himself, of what he is doing, but the only way to secure him is to feel the need of consulting him, or obtaining spiritual counsel. I have spoken to Simpson about it. But he is so dreadfully literal—he would give the whole thing away. I never knew anyone with less idea of diplomacy. That comes of being in the Foreign Office, where "conversations" mean an interchange of lengthy menaces!

(39)

[Gray's Inn.]

Here's another marvel. Northover has been ill, not dangerous exactly, but something which might have become chronic. Over-sugared jam becomes *candied*, we know; my own theory is that this is what has happened to Northover. He has arranged everything in his life with such perfection, so that he couldn't by any possibility be disengaged or bored, and oiled the machine by such liberal expenditure of money, that the sweetness has suddenly coagulated. But whether he was ill or not, he was frightened about himself. He hates going abroad; he says that foreigners are the curse of the place: and he was faced with the prospect of Karlsbad or Aix. How he carried on! He became the worst sort of bore. He was furious if you asked him how he was, and sulky if you didn't.

Then Lady N. doesn't like her habits interfered with either, and was quite determined that he should do whatever was ordered. They are a wonderful pair, and come nearer to the not

very transcendental ideal depicted in the English Marriage Service than most married couples —the parties to a reasonable contract with very definite provisos. They are, in fact, a small company with very limited liabilities.

So N. who, like many swashbucklers, is deeply conscious of the injustice of his own afflictions, got thoroughly scared. Lady N., to bring him to heel, conveyed to him by subtle dramatic silences and hesitations that she had had a far worse account of him than the doctors dared to communicate to him personally—"The chances are decidedly in your favour, but you must *take* them."

First of all, Northover made his will. Then he sold his stud; then he sent cheques to hospitals; then he went to Mme Zedella, the palmist. Then he went and gave a vote in the House of Lords, and sate on the wrong side; then he sacked his agent. Then he took to his bed. He was like a man searching in a bit-basket for the remains of what he believed to be his duty. But when he got a copy of *Sartor Resartus*, Lady N. became alarmed, and implored him to send for Chris.

Chris came at once, and asked me to put him up for a night or two.

He seems to have had a very singular interview with the pair. He came round to me

hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry. He had been taken on first by Lady N.

"Can't you help us, Chris? I am quite upset about Northover."

"Of course I will do anything I can."

"I knew you would—you don't want an old friend to become eccentric."

"I don't know what is the matter."

"Nor do I—but you know that two of his uncles were very odd; and N. gave me a real fright yesterday. He said he thought it was a great mistake giving up going to church. He said we ought to have lived more at Northacre, because he *had* to go to church there. I said, 'What *does* it matter?' and he looked at me very queerly, and said 'One never knows.' I a little lost my temper, and said that it was no use coming to *me* for spiritual consolation, and he said that I was right for once. I am really feeling quite alarmed about him, he looks so wild. I would almost rather that he—no, I don't quite mean that—but he would find it such a trial to be not quite like other people, you know, and I don't think I could bear it."

"I don't think you need be afraid—it's only nerves, I expect!"

"I'm always afraid when nerves take a religious turn, Chris."

"I don't think there is any real fear of that!"

"It would bring me to my grave, Chris!"

"That was only the preface—the introit," said Chris. "I was conducted up to Northover, whom I found sitting up in bed in a Japanese dressing-gown, reading a French novel, but upside down.

"He was rather pathetic," said Chris; "he was just as rude as ever, but there wasn't any powder behind the shot. He made a confused statement. He said that he knew I was up in philosophy and all that, and that he was a good deal bothered, but couldn't bear the idea of a parson. I asked what was the matter exactly, and he said that he had always had a good time, but he felt now as if something had been left out, though he didn't think he had done anything really low, and had kept pretty straight; 'but I feel,' he said, 'as if I ought to beg someone's pardon!'"

"'That isn't a very frequent experience with you?' I said.

"'D—n it, if you are going to be funny,' said N., 'you had better clear out!'

"'I'm not being funny,' I said; 'I'm only very much surprised.'

"'Yes, I see,' said N., 'that's just like me—I can't keep my temper about the simplest

things! But the fact is that I feel so devilish queer—if I get up, I spin round like a teetotum, and they have cut off the drink and the smokes, and feed me on paps and juices, and order me to do this and that, till I don't know if I'm on my head or my heels. And then I lie here and get thinking about early days at Northacre and Eton, and the old Life Guards' mess—one thing has just led on to another, and I've had no plan —and Kate isn't very cheering—you don't think it's a case of pegging out, old man?'

"'Certainly not,' said I; 'I don't believe there's the smallest danger.'

"'You see,' Northover went on, 'I could stick it out if I were to be marched out, and blindfolded, and shot. But it's this melting down I can't stand. And then lying here, with people just tiptoeing in, and talking as if they were in church, I get the blues; and you'll hardly believe it, but I began to feel as if someone—well, someone like my old headmaster, all eyes and moustache—were sitting here and waiting for me to speak; and as if I got flurried and said, "Well, bring it on—what have you got against me?" And as if the old chap shook his head and said, "You can tell better than I can." 'Good God,' said Northover, beginning to fidget, 'it's like a mixture of a play and a nightmare! Then I thought

I must read something, or I should go off the lines, and I got hold of this [producing a volume of Carlyle sheepishly from under the pillow] which a stuck-up jackass was jawing about at Ascham's. And I can't make head or tail of it—reads like one of the Christ Church dons in delirium—full of bosh and German and what not.'

"'I don't think it's quite the book for you,' I said.

"'Well, what the h—ll am I to do? Look, there I go again—I'm losing all control of myself.'"

"What a picture, Chris!" said I. "What's the matter with him?"

"The terrors of hell, I think," said Chris.

"But he isn't a great ruffian," I said.

"Yes, that's just what he is! He isn't what is technically called a great *sinner*—that means that a man knows better. Northover doesn't know better. He isn't bestial, he isn't deliberately cruel, he isn't a liar—it has never been worth his while to tell a lie—he is just abominably selfish and rude—kind-hearted in an odd way, but a bully. What really bothers me is that it really doesn't seem worth *anybody's* while to have made him—but he *is* made, and also rather liberally endowed."

"But Lady N.?" I said.

"She can go to the devil," said Chris.

"A short crossing?" I hazarded. Chris looked at me in silence.

"What on earth did you say to him?" I said.

"I told him not to be a fool," said Chris. "I took away his book. I told him to get up and dress to-morrow, and get someone to dine on the next day. And then I told him very seriously that he was to write down on a bit of paper all the things he could remember he had done of which he felt *really* ashamed. 'Mind,' I said, 'not the things of which you feel you *ought* to be ashamed, nor the things of which you think *I* should feel you ought to be ashamed —only the things, if there are any, which you yourself hate to think you have done. And I will see you on Saturday, and you shall explain them.' And then I said, 'Now mind, Northover, you have got somehow to get this stuff off your mind; it is a simple enough case; you have a sort of abscess in your mind, and it must be relieved, or else . . .' He interrupted me with a sort of gurgle—'Good God, Chris,' he said, 'don't go on about that—you've hit it—"an abscess in my mind," yes, that's what it is, but what the devil am I to do?' He lay looking at me with his eyes like black pin-points,

moistening his lips, not a nice sight at all. 'Hold on,' I said; 'if you choose to do as I tell you, I can promise you that you will be well in a month —but you must also promise faithfully to do exactly what I tell you to do about these things; whatever they may be. But if you don't play fair, and if you keep things back, then you will be worse than ever."

"Did he promise?" I said.

"He couldn't speak," said Chris, "but he nodded."

"It will take him some time to make out his little bill," I said, reflecting.

"No," said Chris, "it will be quite a short list, and very absurd."

"It's confession, Chris!"

"Yes, and absolution too."

"What good will it do him?"

"*Good?*" said Chris, "why, very little. You can't alter people."

"Then what's the use of bullying him?"

"It will give him a fresh start—that's all one can do—one can't *make* him a better fellow. But he will *be* a better fellow, or at any rate have the chance of being so."

"What has come over you, old man?" I said. "You seem to me a sort of priest!"

"Everybody," said Chris, "has got to be a priest once in a way, unless he is a selfish brute!"

"Well, at all events," I said, "*I* have never had to undertake such a job!"

"On the contrary," said Chris, "you are doing for me, at this very moment, exactly what I have been trying to do for N. You think me rather a humbug, and are hoping to make me ashamed of myself."

I could say nothing—I just looked at him.

"But I'm *not* ashamed," said Chris, "at least I should have been more ashamed if I had done nothing."

"Chris, you are too much for me!" I said.

"No, old boy, you are too much for yourself!"

And then we went out and had dinner. Chris was very amusing; but all the evening I felt as if he had given me a good thrashing, and I was glad he had done so. I deserved it.

(40)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris effaced himself most of the next day. He saw Jane and Gladys, and looked in upon some of the others. But he said nothing about anyone, and in the evening talked about Tolstoy. I suggested that he had had rather a Tolstoyan day—"a thousand blended notes"—and he admitted it. "But," he said, "Tolstoy is on the right track after all. Life is not romantic, as a rule, as in Turgenef; nor is it atrocious, as in Dostoievsky—each of them is, in his way, doing up life like dressed crab—it's crab unmistakably, though augmented and treated; but in Tolstoy people go ahead, not quite knowing why—flying off the lines occasionally and rather repentant, often for prudential reasons, but on the whole good-hearted, capable of much affection for others, and of doing a good deal, even in the way of self-sacrifice, for those they love. That's my idea of human beings—that their intelligence is limited, their power of discrimination weak, their imaginative sympathy small;

and though there is a good sprinkling of weak and selfish people, the really wicked, malevolent, and unscrupulous people are comparatively rare —what is deplorable is the weakness of the arguments and the sentimentality of the emotions which appeal to them."

He went on—I forget how—to quote a passage from Newman—we found it in the *Apologia*. It runs thus: "The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or steal one poor farthing without excuse."

"Of course," Chris said, "the last two words go a long way to nullify the whole ridiculous statement, because no human being can assess anyone's responsibility. But it is the pontifical frame of mind which starts from such principles as those which keeps religion from being the sort of help to the world that it might be—it is attributing that kind of hysterical severity to God which makes the thought of God so repellent to human beings. . . ."

We had a vague discussion about religion

generally. Chris said that it was the chief reason which had made him try to change the current of his life. "I was beginning," he said, "to feel as if there were hardly any good motives in use in the world—and that the few people who believed in principles did so quixotically and illogically—like the Queen in *Alice* who had contrived to believe ten impossible things before breakfast.

"But now," he went on, "since I have been more alone, I have begun to think that there is a very big thing in and behind the world which is making signals to us, and trying, not very successfully, to get some message through. Some people recognise it as Love, some as Goodness, some as Beauty—a very few as Truth; and it seems to me as if the difference between the religious and non-religious man lies in recognising an intention of some kind towards us—though of course the very name of religion is made sickening by such statements as that of Newman's; and I do think that the world is very much in need of a simple restatement of faith, as apart from the dreary apparatus of dogma—the very word 'dogma' has something obstinate and snarling about it!"

That's about all I remember of a long talk;

but it made me feel a sense of a wider horizon about Chris than I have ever realised before. He *was* a charming opportunist. Now, I think, there is some touch of a larger patience and a more vivid hopefulness about him.

(41)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris came in only an hour before dinner this evening—he is full of mysteries. He had in his hand a sheet of letter-paper. "Here's a curious document!" he said. "This is Northover's conception of the Day of Judgment. It is just what I expected. I should dearly love to read it aloud and have a good laugh over it. It would be worth its weight in gold to a psychoanalyst—the dregs of Northover's soul—very small definite things most of them, and not the faintest idea that he has got the whole thing wrong from beginning to end. He's a Pharisee, is Northover. He recognises the worth of principle! He has a lean conception of duty—like a little hard nut with a wrinkled kernel. But one of these peccadilloes at all events will involve him in considerable expense—I left him ruefully fingering a cheque-book. Freddy is dining with them to-night, and I told Northover to get it all off his mind before dinner. He's obviously better—'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,' you know." Chris crumpled up the

little paper and threw it into the fire. "Northover paid me one compliment; he said, 'Well, Chris, anyhow it is a comfort to know that you are not the sort of fellow to go in for blackmail.' I said, 'You wait until I am reduced to poverty!' Another sign of grace was that he wanted to pay my expenses in coming up to London. This I declined; though I expect he will make me some impossible present. But it will do him good, and I shan't refuse it. I think better of Northover and worse of Lady Northover, I fear. I told her frankly that I regarded her as mainly responsible for his illness. She looked at me like a serpent, blinking and flat-headed. You see if she doesn't try to blacken my character! Well, thank God, that's all over."

He said he must go off first thing in the morning. We had in dear old Jane to dinner. She must have been reading up Kingsley's *Hermits*, I think, good old girl—she had such a lot of confused stories to tell; but she said some shrewd things.

"There's only one thing I don't feel sure about, Chris!" she said.

"My dear lady, tell me instantly, and I will put it right!"

"I don't think you have anyone to quarrel with down at Charters."

"Well, and what then?"

"I think it is rather like an egg without salt."

"But what am I to do? One can't pick a quarrel for the sake of one's spiritual health!"

"You mustn't get *too* reasonable, Chris!"

"Well, I'll get out the clergy list when I get back, and see if I can find a parson to have a row with."

"Oh, but they won't hit you back!"

"Well, Jane, I'll bear it in mind—and let me add that I think you are a very shrewd woman—I believe you are quite right."

Jane beamed all over; and when she went off, she gave Chris a shameless hug. Chris submitted gallantly, and said, holding her hands, "Mind, I shall expect you down at Charters for a Sunday soon—but after this, I shall really have to ask you to bring a chaperone. We practise a more austere code of virtue down in the country—and you must be more discreet, dear Jane, in our guileless circles."

It was rather a pretty scene somehow, and warmed my hard heart in an odd way.

(42)

[CHARTERS.
Christmas Day.]

HERE I am, at Charters. Chris took me on for Christmas, and I was glad to escape from the old paper-cap and crackers business which the Aschams are so careful to keep going. They didn't much demur to my absence—I am regarded as a backslider; they think I have gone over to the enemy. I was publicly attacked on the subject, but the gallant Northover came to my help. "What rot!" he said. "Why shouldn't Chris have his own blow-out at this hallowed season? You needn't fumble about with excuses, Jack! I like our old rag well enough, but I'm blowed if I wouldn't go down to Charters for Christmas if I were asked."

"I am afraid I am the chief obstacle," said Lady Northover. "I couldn't face the domestic festival alone, and Chris wouldn't have me at any price. He thought I was over-anxious about Northover when he was ill, and said so, without regard for my feelings. In fact, I can't help thinking that he is getting a little priggish."

"Where does he get it from?" said Northover in a loud voice, looking fiercely round, "if I knew the address of his wine-merchant, I would send some of the same stuff round to his loving friends."

He looked so angry that Mrs. Ascham tactfully said, "Yes, of course we ought to think of Chris a little—and I am sure it is very unselfish of Jack to go,"—so I escaped.

I came down through bitter wind and sleet, and I am bound to say that the Cotswolds looked as bleak as Spitzbergen. It was Christmas Eve, and the train was tiresomely full and very late. However, I got there by tea-time, when the day was closing in.

The house was deliciously warm. Chris came out to meet me looking very radiant. "Prepare for a blow, old man," he said. "It is now nearly five o'clock. You shall have some tea, and at six o'clock—by which time you will be *rested*—we have a very small and select Christmas-tree. Mrs. and Miss Bevir, Mrs., Master, and Miss Anson, Aunt and Master Joicey, Mr. and Mrs. Reddaway, Miss Dixon, you and me—that makes twelve! It is timed to end sharp at 7.30. The parents and guardians are sworn to that. I said you were in delicate health, and might not feel up to it. So if you prefer to

smoke in your bedroom, do—really, I mean it—do just as you like!"

"What nonsense!" I said. "Who's to be the life and soul of the party, if not I! You haven't got a false beard, or anything of that kind handy? I feel the need of a disguise. I want to leave a false impression, and to look perfectly beastly, like Pitman! I desire to frighten someone!"

Chris laughed. "No time, I'm afraid—and this affair is run on strictly evangelical principles. Miss Joicey is very much afraid of symbols."

"Well, I'll do my best," I said.

Mrs. Bevir was the first to arrive. I should hardly have recognised her. She looked ten years younger, and had a quiet animation which was refreshing. She looked indeed remarkably beautiful, in a black dress distinctly fashionable. She greeted Chris serenely, shook hands with me, and said, "I am *very* glad to see you again."

Helen meanwhile held up her face to Chris to be kissed as a matter of course. He took her hand in his, and led her to me. "Why, it's the other gentleman at last!" said Helen, and shook hands with me gravely. Mrs. Anson, the Vicar's wife, led in a pair of impassive children—more kissing followed, till I felt quite paternal. Aunt Joicey, a somewhat battered spinster, with

one eye flickering with excitement, presented Master Joicey. The children regarded each other with thinly veiled hostility, as heirs in hope of desirable property. Mr. Reddaway, in a state of high discomfort with a stiff shirt and a broadcloth suit, deeply embarrassed, appeared; and Mrs. Reddaway, almost tearful with the sense of distinction, made on entering a delightful old-fashioned bob, obviously to the disapproval of her niece, Miss Dixon, the pretty young housemaid.

How was it done? The awkward party sorted itself at the magic touch of Chris. Mrs. Anson drew Mrs. Reddaway aside for a consultation, accompanied by many nods and lifted forefingers. Aunt Joicey—who turned out a very merry Socinian, produced compliments of incredible outspokenness on the niece's good looks, and on Mr. Reddaway's heartiness; the children began to whisper and giggle. Mrs. Bevir plunged into talk with me, shyly but decisively; and Chris, with Helen's arm through his own, distributed his favours impartially.

The Christmas-tree was in the big room, covered with red tapers and bright globes of looking-glass. The faint scent of singed evergreens went straight to my heart. It was all much too serious for talk. Chris called us up one by one from the astonished group, and read

out absurd inscriptions and ascriptions; such a richness of small and quite unrepeatable jokes I never heard. I had not thought that Chris could so hit the average taste—we had neither irony or innuendo—full-flavoured personalities. I was "the gentleman from nowhere"—and as Chris severely said, if I came from nowhere, I could have nowhere to put anything. At which I wept inconsolably, till Aunt Joicey, greatly daring, told me to cheer up, and Helen pressed a small drum of sweets upon me. The others frankly could not part with their gifts. Mrs. Bevir said she didn't feel it would be *right* to do that, but she would give me a shilling—and so on. . . . Yet I have seldom had a better time.

Then we sate down, played some guessing games; and Chris told a fairy story—so extraordinarily beautiful somehow—though idiotic in structure and improbable in incident—that the tears came into my eyes. Aunt Joicey, I fear, found it fanciful. Mrs. Bevir sate with downcast eyes, while the children eyed each other's presents, and searched the tree with glances to see if there might not be some lurking aftermath—and yet listening in a way all the time. Only Helen showed some human interest. She stood leaning against Chris's chair, never taking her eyes from his face—once or twice

smiles passed between them. But there was no flirtatious fondling, no Ionic movements!

Trust Chris to be punctual! The story finished at 7.25. I was sitting next Mrs. Bevir, and said to her, "I *am* enjoying myself so much! Can't you all manage to stop a little longer for the sake of the wretched old man from nowhere, who finds himself somewhere for once?"

Mrs. Bevir flashed a quick little smile at me. "No!" she said, "our host would never forgive me! I promised; and then the children ought to be off. They want to go and gloat!"

"Chris is marvellous!" I said.

"Oh, didn't you know that?" said Mrs. Bevir, in ingenuous tones.

"I sometimes think I know nothing about him," I said, "and yet he is my best and dearest friend."

"He is very much devoted to you," said Mrs. Bevir, "but then he is to most people. He is very good to Helen—gives her some lessons in English literature—much too advanced for me. She adores him, though he never pets or spoils her—indeed he is rather stern at times."

"Zarathustra's whip, I suppose?" I said.

"Ah, that's too recondite for me," said Mrs. Bevir. "But I hope we may see you at Scantling. We don't often see Mr. Gascoyne. He is quite immovable."

"I will see that he comes with me," I said. "I'm too shy, and indeed not old enough this evening, to go to parties alone."

Chris had them all out of the house as the clock struck 7.30; commanded the Reddaways, who retired, overpowered with glory and worship, to get dinner ready. Annie Dixon lingered. "Don't let your aunt run about too much this evening, there's a good girl," said Chris. "She will have rather a heavy day to-morrow—good-night, Annie!"

We had a pleasant impromptu kind of dinner. Mr. Reddaway had sunk from the awkward guest into the decisive retainer, and Annie helped him with his duties.

Then we talked. I insisted on Chris giving me a sketch of all our guests—charming vignettes. I asked about Mrs. Bevir. He told me that she had taken the whole village in hand—"though I think," he said, "that she is rather conscience-stricken about B. and fancies that she might have made more of him."

"And Helen," I said, "is a perfect darling."

"Isn't she?" said Chris; "like Phyllis, she's my only joy!"

(43)

[Charters.]

I have had a curious day. We went up to lunch at Scantling. It had lost the hangdog, broken-down look I remembered—and indeed, was as comely and well-ordered a little mansion as heart could desire.

Mrs. Bevir did not say much; and Chris bore up the pillars of the talk. After luncheon he went off with Helen to elucidate some problem connected with guinea-pigs or rabbits; and I remained to talk to Mrs. Bevir. She was evidently very curious about Chris, and knew nothing of what his life had been. "He is so mysterious!" she said. "It makes me realise the stories in the Old Testament about the visits of angels—I don't mean that Mr. Gascoyne is an angel exactly—but to have someone walk into one's life—and mine, you know," she said, very simply and directly, "had become a very disordered one—someone who is ready to untie all knots and assume all burdens, and straighten out everything, and yet do it without any particular interest in it or any personal motive—

it makes me think of the old proverb ' God does not always *come*, but He always *sends*.' "

" Chris is very fond of your Helen," I said.

" He is and he isn't," said Mrs. Bevir; " he's rather like a kindly and patient elder brother—there doesn't seem to be anything sentimental about it. That's what puzzles me about Mr. Gascoyne, that he has got a life of his own somewhere, and I don't know what or where it is."

" Mrs. Bevir," I said, " I am Chris's closest friend, I believe; and he is almost the only man I know who makes me feel really hopeful about the human race—but I know nothing either about his inner life at all. He goes to people's heads—and he has this extraordinary force of sympathy. With many people sympathy is only a kind of scent you sprinkle over what is hot, ugly, unpleasant—but Chris uses it in a different way—to heal people. It all sounds as if he were priggish, but he isn't; he is never shocked, and he is never grieved; he hates people, he is bored by them, but he is always just and kindly to them. He is civilised all through, not only skin-deep, and that's the weak point, that his heart is civilised, not only his head. He has no unreasonable or unruly impulses."

She was listening to me with a deep, almost mournful attention.

"Yes," she said, "I think that is true—nothing ever comes very near to *him*. He comes near to *you*—and all the time he is miles away."

"Has he never had any troubles?" she went on after a pause.

"I suppose so," I said, "but he seldom or never speaks of them."

"Has he any particular friends?"

"A good many," I said. "He and I belong or belonged to a friendly and fairly intelligent set of people, who had got in the way of living rather in each other's pockets—a coterie, it might be called. Chris was the centre of it all; an old uncle of his left him some money rather unexpectedly, and Chris broke loose from everything, and retired into the wilderness—or rather into the Cotswolds—not I think to *be* alone, but because he really *was* alone."

"But what does he do?"

"God knows," said I, "that's just the question—he writes, studies, enjoys the open air, and yet, without intruding, is always being called upon to solve unpleasant situations. He never resists an appeal, and he never flags, till he has tidied it all up—but he doesn't *want* anyone."

Then I told her something about Gladys, in outline and anonymously.

"So he doesn't tidy up everything, it seems?"

"No—he gives money, time, care, trouble—not himself."

"Who does?" said Mrs. Bevir. "Isn't there something at the back of all that we can't give away, unless it is taken?"

"And not always then," I said. . . .

It was a relief when Chris and Helen came back. I felt as if I had waded suddenly out of my depth.

"Helen is anxious about Polonius," he said. "He fights with Desdemona—the rabbits [this to me] have all got Shakespearean names, the guinea-pigs have names from Dickens. Little Dorrit ate two of her babies yesterday."

"I told her it was horrible," said Helen, "but she only licked her lips and looked wicked."

"I can't think how you can bear them, Helen," said Mrs. Bevir.

"I'm sorry for them," said Helen. "I think I am more sorry for them when they are alive than when they are dead. But I can't do without Little Dorrit. She knew me last Friday, though she has forgotten who I am to-day."

Then we departed. I agree with Chris that there is something very fine about Mrs. Bevir.

(44)

[Charters.]

I go back to town to-day. When I went up to bed last night, I said:

"Chris, I have had a good time, and I am truly thankful for what I have received."

"You have given us all a good time, old boy —you are a brick."

"Chris, you *can't* go on like this! It is getting ludicrous."

"I can't think what you mean—I'm sure I'm harmless enough!—and not quite useless either!"

"Chris, you madden me. You can't go on expecting everyone to be attached to you, and making them attached to you, and not caring twopence about anyone."

"I love their souls, like St. Francis," said he.

"Oh bother their souls," I said, "why must you always see *through* people?"

"You seem to think I'm always in the wrong," said Chris mildly.

"No, you are never in the wrong—that's the worst of it. Why not do something definite, like Bevir?"

Chris gave a little sigh, and smiled. "You must be content with my being harmless, old man."

"I wish," I said, "that I could put a charge of dynamite into your soul, and blow it up—it is getting encysted—you will end by fatty degeneration."

"You're quite at liberty to try what you can do!" said he.

"Of course, I can't *do* anything," I said, "I can only sit by and see you perish of hunger!"

"It's very good of you, old chap," he said, "to take such an interest! But you can depend upon it that I shall do nothing that I don't like!"

Could anything be more intensely aggravating?

(45)

[Gray's Inn.]

I came away from Charters in considerable turmoil of mind about Chris, and yet it seems, on the one hand, so ridiculous to be upset, and on the other hand so impertinent to interfere. Let me survey the position entirely! If a friend of ours went off to the country, we should not as a rule question his decision—we should probably forget all about him with remarkable celerity. If Northover announced his intention of residing at Northacre, we shouldn't gravely trouble his repose, or like the witch of Endor, disquiet him to bring him up. On the other hand, if a friend to whom we were greatly attached were to go off to the wilderness, and we thought that he was in a morbid frame of mind or contracting undesirable habits, we might possibly [Chris would, for instance] have a try at comforting or rescuing him, though I myself, I shrewdly suspect, should shrug my shoulders and say it was not my business.

But here we have a friend to whom we are much beholden—indeed, I frankly confess that

I can't do without him, and the thought that I can't get at him almost maddens me at times —he has heaped benefits upon us with both hands, and we can't let him alone. Worse still, we profess anxiety as to his spiritual condition, even though, so far as I can see, he has gained in every way by his flight. He is not only happier and more equable, but he is ready to respond to the faintest cry for help, and full of sympathy and resource.

The fact is that, like the hymn, "I need his presence every passing hour"—I want to refer everything to his tolerant and yet decisive virtue; and then I sincerely feel (at least I *think* this is sincere) that he is too fine a creature to be let go of without a struggle. I don't pretend to be a high-minded or unselfish man, but I have an affection for the poor old world, which, though it has some atrocious habits, vile lapses from taste and decency, crushing stupidities, ugly malevolences, is yet a well-meaning and pitiable old beast of burden, carrying a heavy load to a very uncertain goal. I don't profess to devote myself to the good of the world, or to the service of my fellow-men, but I do my own work respectably, and I am capable of extending a helping hand to lame dogs, so long as they touch my sense of interest or pathos in some degree. And I have a meagre

sense of duty so far as to wish to leave behind me some traces of an attempt to improve matters.

Now Chris seems to me to have a perfect genius for helping things to improve; it isn't that he is either diplomatic or calculating; he is singularly free from the vice of doing good for his own ultimate advantage; but he has a deep interest up to a certain point in his fellow-creatures, as long so they won't paw him or bow down to him; and his lack of personal ambition, as well as his freedom from all polluting or enervating sentiment, makes him peculiarly adapted to be a practitioner in cases of psychical disease, because he has the merciless spectatorial discrimination of the surgeon and the doctor—he makes no amiable concessions to suffering, if he perceives the drastic possibilities of relief.

I want him to realise this. I admit that we have exploited him; it is as though we have used the deftness of the skilled surgeon to carve chickens for our luncheon-parties; but yet to leave him to employ his amazing talents to arrange small Christmas festivities in the bleakest part of the Cotswolds, and to resolve the perplexities of the widows of tipsy squires, seems to me no less than disgraceful.

Anyhow I am inditing him a letter, in the

persuasive style of St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, to implore him to realise his responsibilities, and to find a sphere in which to display them.

Of course the danger in such a case generally is that if one continues to beg a man to use his beautiful influence, one embarks as a rule on the manufacture of the worst kind of prig; but no amount of compliments levelled at Chris would ever diminish for an instant his incorruptible and serene ingenuousness. Most people develop a sickening readiness to do whatever they are told they do well. Lady Jane's silly old crony, Lady Stokes, would submit to unheard-of inconvenience in order to open a bazaar, from having been once told that she possessed exactly the right mixture of dignity and womanliness; but to tell Chris that he had dealt firmly and tactfully with a troublesome business would be like complimenting Sargent on the unmistakable resemblance between his portraits and their sitters. . . .

The worst of it is that there isn't a profession for the display of Chris's peculiar gifts, though there are many professions in which the possession of such gifts would bring a man promptly and decisively to the front. But Chris hasn't got any special professional gifts—he's a moderate writer and a fair lecturer; but

he has no administrative gifts, finance bores him, he has no political or social ambitions, he isn't what may be called a promotable man, and he has never been calculating enough to develop the aplomb, the pose of mysterious influence and unquestionable competence, which smooths the path of so many public men.

Thus my difficulty is that if he says, "Well, what do you advise me to *do*?" I haven't any answer ready. I can't tell him to go about laying his hands on sick people, faith-healing, curing nervous maladies—although his power really lies in a unique genius for diagnosing and relieving the deep maladies of the soul. He is a prophet without a message, a priest without a religion.

(46)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris has replied to my letter, patiently and affectionately, but without the smallest sign of yielding. Here is what he says:

"*Dear old Man,*

"*I should be less than human if I weren't much touched and moved by your letter. I see you have some reason to be dissatisfied with me and indeed I am by no means satisfied with myself—but it doesn't lead me to any practical issues. I can't open an office and say, 'Moral crises and psychological entanglements promptly and tactfully dealt with.' Whatever I do, and it doesn't amount to much in the kind of cases you refer to, can only be done incidentally as they occur, and I am not going to embark on a thaumaturgical career.*

"*Neither, to speak the plain truth, do I care for the kind of people whom you hint I might be of use to—hysterical, imaginative, hypochondriacal people, on the borderline of insanity. I have no-*

thing clinical about me, and a great shrinking from illnesses which develop the nastiest kinds of egotism. You no doubt could clean a sewer as effectively as many a scavenger—yet you don't feel it to be a duty. I disbelieve too—though perhaps I am only disguising my indolence—in the reality of such treatment. It is often nothing more than the application of anodynes—it doesn't cure, it only suspends the action of the consciousness which contains the one hope of cure.

"I feel neither the duty nor the disposition to intervene. Of course if I begin at the other end, and care enough for anyone to hate to see them afflicted, I do somehow overcome my natural disgust sufficiently to do the best I can; but I am only aware of attacking the practical and external causes of such disorders. You would like to persuade me that I have an inspiring touch. You must believe me when I say that I have nothing of the kind. I am not sure of my own ground in these matters; and no one can effectively preach, as certainties, dogmas in which he doesn't sincerely believe.

"As for the other side of it—when you ask me what I think I am *doing—I believe in a certain conservation of the energies of life. I don't indulge in flaccid indolence and desultory dreaming; but equally I don't believe in violent and*

vehement effort, heaping up of gymnastic feats, panting and straining forwards in a whirl of dust and sweat. That seems to me a diseased and feverish way of living, and to be merely another morbid fashion of silencing the questions which life obtrudes so nakedly upon us day after day.

" Of course sometimes these desperate rushes have to be made in moments of urgency and danger —but they waste the very stuff of life, and prodigally scatter its capital.

" I couldn't be one of these hurried, flustered, Titanic people, if I tried. They seem to me like the frog in the fable, inhaling wind with starting eyes and swollen veins, in a passion of envy and egotism. It is a ridiculous performance at best, a man sacrificing all the temperate delights of life to the desperate desire of seeming to be what he can never hope to be—a sham superman, made insensible by mere intoxication to the fate that confronts and claims him at last.

" It is the mistake made by Nietzsche, the hectic rebellion against law and limitation—the mistake made by Byron, feigning to be the prey of gigantic emotions.

" Perhaps I am a mere self-deceived hedonist, but I don't feel *guilty of that. It seems to me that the present-day moralist mistakes quantity for quality, multiplies small engagements, spins*

and buzzes like a teetotum, and tries to give a dignified name to what is little more than a frantic desire to create an impression.

" I can't come back to the old life I was leading, which indeed seems to me, from every point of view, infinitely inferior to the life I am now leading. I used to be full of hurry and scheming, of foolish chivalries and stupid pretences—it was a sickly, over-heated, over-perfumed life, intended for, but not providing, the delectation of a few harmless but entirely useless people.

" Now at least I lay out my time healthfully and temperately, and I have recovered a natural joy in life which is eager without being hectic. When on rare occasions I have to perform an unpleasant duty, I find myself neither unnerved nor excited, indifferent about causes and possible results, only anxious to do my best.

" I don't expect to make a great success of writing—I can't get myself down on paper, or rather, in print—for I can say to you in a letter what I can't attempt to say to the world at large. When I begin to write books, habit and convention assert their sway, and make me stiff and conventional.

" I am inclined to believe that the best lives are those that are disciplined and planned and strenuously enjoyed—because the happiness which that sort of discipline brings is the most real and sub-

stantial thing I have ever felt. I'm not in the least a misanthrope nor a skulker. It is another form, I think, of the old monastic instinct, only that it is unfortunately no longer able to be built upon the kind of faith which the monks genuinely held. Science has knocked the old faith into a mass of dignified ruins, and religion has not yet been able to sort out the essential elements.

" But I think I may say this, that at all events I feel prepared *for most things. I don't at all want to have misfortunes, but I don't think I should be so helpless in the face of them as I used to be. I don't want unpleasant duties, but I should not shirk them. Don't think I say all this with a serene complacency. I often find the taste of life extremely nasty, and I am too often a complete coward in the presence of the horrible mysteries which surround us all; but I have got a lantern for my feet and a light for my path—an uncertain and glimmering light indeed, and I don't by any means discern the hand that bears it; but I can honestly say that I am nearer now than I have ever been in my life to following some sort of loving-kindness—a big thing, insupportably and terrifyingly big at times, but real enough to feel that I am more wholesomely and rightly occupied than if I were planning water-parties and visits to the opera, and making up twaddling*

talk about ideas which I did not really perceive or feel.

" Do you remember a quaint old hymn we used to bawl at school, and even exercise our wit upon,

" 'A living stream, as crystal clear'?

That, without any pretence or humbug, seems to be what I have stumbled across—and it is that which makes so infinitely dear and beautiful the daily presence of my little hill-fountain, leaping crystalline and cool from the stone lip of its cistern, and plaiting its silver threads down its grassy channel, very careless of its work and duty, and yet of an essential and undeniable holiness.

" Don't be vexed with me if I seem obstinate and affected. I don't think I am either—it's a very tremulous hope at best; but you are one of the very few people about whom I should feel that I cared deeply whether you were vexed or not.

" Affectionately yours,
" Chris."

What is one to say to all this? I don't know, I am sure. He has got hold of something very real, I can't help thinking, which makes me feel like Cophetua in the presence of the beggar-maid—the fat old king with his ermine and scarlet, stuffed with rich blood-making meat

and drink—and the lovely, ragged, large-eyed girl. . . . All I can do at present is to tell him pertly that whether his stream waters paradise or not, I don't know—but that it certainly makes the angels sing!

(47)

[Gray's Inn.]

I have really given Chris a long time all to himself—and there comes out this calf! By which I mean his book, of which he has sent me an advance copy, bless him!

But I don't know what to say about it all? It consists of the *disjecta membra* of Chris—an eye here, a tooth there—two legs and a piece of an ear! He has left out the one thing which might have kept it all together—himself! It is heartrending.

It is full of the sort of things which Chris, above all men, sees; he has a rare eye for perceiving things which are curious and beautiful the moment they are pointed out, but which most of us overlook—charming combinations, fantastic oddities, rosy-bosomed hours, ascetic thrills. It is full, too, of the kind of things which Chris might say, and which yet gain all their point and emphasis on his lips from the ironical little comment which follows close behind, and which just saves the first remark from a suspicion of preciosity; but it is just the comment which he can say, but can't write.

I suppose the truth is that what we feel to be most characteristic of him is just what seems so commonplace and obvious to himself that it isn't worth putting down.

Anyone who knew Chris would enjoy the book —it is all redolent and fragrant with his charm ; but no one who did not know Chris could form the least idea from his book what he was really like.

The little touch of sternness—hardness—what is it ?—*that* is missing ; the self-depreciation, the self-ridicule, not insisted upon but just hinted—*that* is missing. There is a sense of universal benevolence about it all, of unruffled calm, both of which are all wrong. Chris is extremely critical—he never confuses what is first-rate with what is second-rate ; but he is wonderfully indulgent, and would tell almost any untruth in order to give pleasure and relieve pain—yet this isn't hypocritical in him—the recipient is the only person who is taken in.

And as to the serenity—he has great superficial stillness—but it is a whirl of currents and eddies below, vortices narrowing downwards,

> *ὑπενερθὲ τε γαῖα φάνεσκε*
> *ψάμμῳ κυανέῃ . . .*

It's the sudden glimpse of bedrock under all the liquid tracery which gives one the sense of

his reality. But Chris always tries the lighter motive, the gentler touch *first*—he conserves his emotional energy.

But I'm wae to think of the critics who will read it and think Chris a fool, and of the fools who will read it and think him a saint.

I am going to write to him and say,

> "You sit in a cloud and sing
> Like pictured angels, careless of what befals,"

and tell him that it is a case of "the voice that breathed o'er Eden." He has no right to be so paradisaical. But one might as well preach to a stone; one can't *move* him.

(48)

[Gray's Inn.]

Chris's book has caught on. I subscribed for the press-cuttings, and all the stale perfumes are poured out, all the cheapest incense burnt. Could anything be more dreadful than unperceptive praise? The Anglo-Saxon can assess and vituperate; he can't eulogise; it is an art which has to be learned, like blowing kisses, and looks in most instances, when executed in public, like the attempt to remove politely some viscous horror from the mouth. Praise, employed for literary purposes, is a mere shovelling on of sickly epithets—nothing spontaneous, nothing discriminating, an ascription of all honour, might, majesty, dominion, and power, henceforth and for evermore. It doesn't even stand for generous admiration, it only stands for the inarticulateness of uninstructed perception.

But it won't do Chris any harm—directly, that is. He will see how hollow and ridiculous it is; but it may have a subtly bad effect in inclining him to write like this for second-rate minds.

The most nauseous of all the reviews is one in the *Paternoster Magazine*, written by someone who knows him or knows about him, and describes in execrable taste his *Hegira* from social distractions, and the contemplative life of sequestered valley and breezy upland. It describes Chris as striding along with the wind in his hair, or sitting in the fading sunset lost in the rapture of memory.

Meanwhile our poor old coterie has now gone hopelessly and finally to pieces. I dined with Jane last night, who is like Rachel weeping for her children. She has fallen so low that she is reduced to saying that we ought to be thankful for our little space of sunlit sky.

"I'm afraid that means, dear lady, that you are letting all your birds out of their pretty cage," I said.

"Like Miss Flite," said Gladys. "Let us hope that they won't be pecked to death by disrespectful sparrows."

"Well, dear," said Jane, "we who remain faithful to the past and to Chris must be more than ever to each other. I have been reading his book, and we must try to be brave, and to behave as he would have us behave."

"I don't think he would wish us to spend our time in weeping over the past," said Gladys.

"Dear Chris is so hopeful," said Jane. "I

always felt we kept him too much to ourselves —we didn't share him with the world as we ought to have done!"

"And now he is engaged in cutting himself into bits and giving them away!" I said.

"Oh, that's ungenerous!" said Jane.

"You mean I ought to wish him to get the top prices for the pieces?" I said.

"You know I don't mean that," said Lady Jane in meek rebellion, "though of course I am glad he should pick up his sixpences."

"I've been wondering about him," said Gladys. "Does he ever write to anyone?"

"He will always answer a letter," I said, "he is always more ready to hear than we to write."

"If only he would show a little temper!" said Gladys. "I don't mind anger—what troubles me is this courteous indifference."

"No, it isn't that," I said. "His is only the attitude of the duckling, coursing about like a ball of yellow down on the pond, with the old hen screaming from the bank. He says to the next duckling, 'Did you ever see anything so absurd as Mummy? you would think we were chickens!'" . . .

So we sang like Philomel, leaning our hearts against the thorn. But I was thankful for that evening anyhow. Gladys isn't breaking her heart any more about Chris—a very little might

revive it all, no doubt; but now she is suffering from a wholesome aggravation at the thought of Chris solemnly and silently enjoying himself, with the sort of vexation which a fervent Protestant feels at the sight of a Catholic friend coming away gleefully from a confessional, with a general sense of hot water and scented soap about him. I shall do my best to water this good seed. Why should dear Gladys waste her precious ointment upon Chris when it might be given to the poor? I exult in thinking that she rather liked my making respectful fun of him.

"Let me write to Chris," I said, "in the tone of an earnest inquirer, and say that I have been reading aloud his book to my dear aunt and cousin in the evenings in our little purple-curtained villa at Brixton—that he has kindled our holiest aspirations, and ask if we may come down to take sweet counsel together with him, or at least press the gracious hand that penned the gracious page, and hear from his lips a little message of high endeavour."

"He would never forgive us," said Jane, looking shocked.

"It's his own fault," I said, "what does he mean by sowing aspirations if he won't water them? He has brought it on himself."

"He wouldn't see us," said Gladys, shaking

her head. "He would write a grateful letter saying that we had encouraged him to try and do better—but we should not get through his guard."

"Say the word and I will contrive it," I said. "It is just the sort of disreputable adventure that I like. I would do the testifying."

But Jane shook her head. "Not to Chris," she said.

"It would be rather fun," said Gladys, "but I shouldn't dare to act at the last moment. His look would turn us—or me—to stone."

(49)

[Gray's Inn.]

I HAVE had a funny little letter from Chris. He begins by thanking me for my frankness in criticism, and admitting that there is something in what I say.

" But I had a terrible experience yesterday," he goes on. " A man, Theodore Gill by name, sent in his card, and walked in, a little dapper, stout fellow, with a head like that of a plump cherub on an organ-loft. He apologised for his intrusion so artlessly that I was melted. He told me that he was a professional critic, had been sent my book to review, and wanted to discuss some points with me. He said gaily that he knew that if he had asked for an interview and stated his business, I should have refused ; ' And now, if you tell me to go, I'll quit—no need to send for the police—I know it is impertinent, but I think you are a good-natured man.'

" Of course I gave way. ' I'll be really brief,' he said, producing a notebook. ' But let me tell you, Mr. Gascoyne, that I'm very much in earnest

about this. The book seems to me to be the kind of thing that hasn't ever been done before in this precise form—and I want to find out exactly what you are out for.'

" We had an hour's talk. I never felt so much shown up in my life. As soon as he felt he had got me, he dropped the babyish wheedling manner.

" I couldn't answer any of his questions—he turned me inside out—I could not remember what books I had been most influenced by, or even what I naturally subsided into when the screw was off (these were his odious phrases). Was I a Hazlittian or a Charles Lambite or a Paterian or an Arnoldite or a Chestertonian or a George Moorite? I had no idea! Did I derive straight from Montaigne and Cicero? Was I an idealist or an impressionist or a synthesist or a spasmodist? I didn't know. ' Come, you must derive from someone,' he said, ' or have a theory, or a point of view —or even perhaps a purpose—though I hope not that.'

" I made a very poor figure. I said I could not be scientifically classed—I was a link, or a sport, or a freak, no doubt.

" He looked at me contemptuously. ' Can't you place yourself a little? ' he said. I couldn't even do that.

" He said that he would give me an outline of his theory of essay development—the germinal train,

he called it—and perhaps I could catch on at a point.

" He gave me a most clear and concise exposition. I could not refute him at any juncture, but it all seemed to me dogmatic nonsense, though he said that of course he made distinct allowances for personality.

" I recognised at last with a shudder that I was in the presence of a scientist—science applied to literature—and worse still, confronted by a man who really thought it all-important.

" 'Truly, I don't know,' I said at last. ' I enjoy life, I jot my scenes and vague ideas down, I try to give glimpses of it all—but it is all a matter of impulse and impression.'

" He shut up his notebook. ' Don't tell me you are just an invertebrate vitalist!' he said. ' Come, have a few *vertebræ!'*

" ' Not for the world,' I said. ' I only regret being unable to make any positive statement on the subject.'

" ' Mr. Gascoyne,' he said at last, ' you must forgive me if I say I am disappointed. You have given vent to what I may call the creed of the amateur. We don't make any progress that way. I fancied from your book that you knew what you were doing—that you had a strict form and a strict content, rather cleverly disguised. These names of mine are of course an incomplete terminology,

but they represent real nuances and tendencies; and I limit myself to patient subdivision and classification, getting closer so to the question of species and controlling instinct. You see the importance of this rigid analysis?'

"I hastened to assure him that I was already more than convinced of its importance. At last he left me, slipping on the trustful and ingenuous mask as he said good-bye—he refused refreshment —but since his departure I have just been sitting bruised and battered, like a sea-anemone drawn from a pool and examined with a magnifying glass. I am only 'a kinless loon,' it seems—of no account in the parallelogram of literary forces—just an excrescence.

"Jack, are there really people who believe in literature like that? I feel as if he had cast an ill-smelling liquor over my beloved books, and spoilt them for future reading. I suppose he has a psychological right to analyse me if he can. But he makes me feel about literature what the Athanasian Creed makes me feel about religion— that it is all a distressing collection of dismal origins and paternities, a philosophical enigma, not a vital force of human expression. Literature, in fact, to my plump little pedant, is just a convenient object to whet his intellectual tusks upon, a phenomenon interesting solely because of its complexity; and to use it so seems to me not only a

profanation, but a treacherous assault upon the finest faculty of human nature. If by a timely exorcism I could have banned him into the body of a fat porker and sent him plunging down Combe Hill, I would have done so—except that it would have been so hard on the porker!"

My only reply to this is that it is Chris's first taste of the penalties of greatness, and that if he is going to be so put off by the incursion of theorists and faddists he had better make up his mind to a refined and judicious silence.

(50)

[Gray's Inn.]

Things are not going very happily with me just now: I feel I am slowly losing touch with Chris. The last time he was here, he left his overcoat behind, and I felt then that it was painfully like the translation of Elijah. Then, too, the old set are getting more and more disintegrated, and losing all coherence; when I do see some of them, there doesn't seem to be any common stock of experiences.

I see a good deal of Jane and Gladys, and I am truly sorry for them. Women can't fall back on books or connoisseurship or art. When poor Simpson, for instance, was refused by that little pussy-cat Evelyn Kempe, Northover's niece, he went in solemnly for art, and said he was going to track down Giorgione—there were a nice manageable number of pictures, and some about which it was orthodox to have doubts. He tracked them down, all except the three that have gone to San Francisco, and became an unholy bore in the process—he hasn't

the smallest instinct for art. But it led to his travelling about in search of atmosphere, and he made some pleasant hotel acquaintances, who proved very tiresome when they came to London and expected invitations; and what with the travelling and the muddling about with books, and learning art-jargon, and disentangling himself from his hotel friends, he succeeded first in forgiving Evelyn, and then in forgetting all about her.

Jane and Gladys could never do anything half as practical as that. They sit and say litanies together about Chris; and when Gladys responds too fervently, Jane has the pleasure of recalling how deftly she kept *her* lovers at arm's length, and how little encouragement she gave them, and how stately it all was; while poor Gladys dashes into one activity after another, and hasn't the heart for any of them.

I had a melancholy talk with her the other day. I went in there and found her alone, holding a book up like a shield against the assaults of the devil.

"Doing a little solid reading?" I said.

"Not very solid, I'm afraid, Jack!—it's only a stupid novel!" She had to look at the back to see what the title was.

"How does the hospital get on?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know. I go and talk, and take them flowers, and the *Sphere* and the *Graphic*. They always seem to me wonderfully cheerful."

"A recumbent position is a great aid to cheerfulness."

"Oh, Jack, how absurd!"

"What do you talk to them about?" I said.

"Oh, I don't talk," said Gladys. "I just listen. They tell me about their symptoms and about their homes, and about the Sisters."

"Well, that's a form of life!"

"Yes, I envy them!" said Gladys. Then she turned to me rather tragically, clasping her hands. "Jack, is there *nothing* real in the world? Where does this awful greyness and dullness come from, blotting out all the hundreds of things I used to care for?"

"It doesn't come from the world outside—like all fog, it comes from the fires within."

"I know . . . I know," said Gladys.

"Gladys," I said suddenly, "I hate to see you like this. I won't say I am sorry, because you wouldn't believe me. You think I am just a sort of comic mask; but it makes me miserable."

"It's very good of you to mind," said Gladys. "I know I must seem so perverse, and what

Jane calls undignified. But I haven't any dignity left—and dignity is a poor thing when it's only a sort of umbrella. What *can* we do, Jack?"

"Can't you take any interest in me?" I said.

"I'm very fond of you," said Gladys with a miserable smile. "I sometimes think you are the only friend I have left."

"We seem like two flies crawling out of the jam-pot," I said, "making red streaks on the tablecloth, and cleaning our hands in vain. Can't we run a race? Can't we have a bet? Can't we find something to do *together*?"

"I'm afraid not, dear Jack."

"It does seem such a ridiculous waste of time," I said. "You are bound to take pity on me some day, you know!"

"I'd do anything *for* you, Jack—but you are so prosperous, and you laugh at everything!"

"Well, I'm blowed! You women! You make us frantic, you make us think about you day and night, you turn us inside out, and then you say 'how unfortunate—a little further off, please!' It really is too much!"

"It isn't my fault, Jack!"

"Of course not—but you are very hard-hearted!"

"No, you mustn't say that!"

"Very well—but I think it! Can't you give anything? Must your will be done?"

"It isn't my will at all—I can't help myself."

"Men don't say that—we are more reasonable!"

"It isn't reason, Jack—that doesn't come in. You wouldn't like it if it did."

"Probably not—but the fact remains that you have bewitched me. You have turned me into a pig, like Circe. Confess that it amuses you to see me like this!"

"I can't listen to you if you talk like that—Jack, I'm very unhappy, please be good to me."

"Why, that's just the one thing I want to be; but when I bring you all the apples off my one little tree, you say, 'I don't care about apples, thank you. Now, there was a nectarine. . . .' Is that to be my answer?"

"It hangs too high, Jack."

"Very well!" I said. "But if you think you are going to shake me off, with your little fingers"—and I took hold of her hand—"you are mistaken! Am I laughing now?"

She left her hand lying in mine. "It's no use, dear Jack," she said, "but you are very dear to me!"

"That's right—wave your wand!" I said.

We heard Jane at the door. Gladys hastily recovered her hand, and Jane came smilingly in.

"Oh, you are here, Jack! What are you talking about?"

"The usual subject," I said.

"Ah yes, poor Chris—how we miss him! But we must learn to do without him."

"I quite agree," I said. "We'll leave him to his own devices, like Tod Lapraik on the Bass Rock!"

"I'm sure you have been having an argument," said Jane, surveying us. "You look quite heated."

"Yes, I have been having a regular set-down," I said. "I have been trying to get Gladys to give me two sixpences for a shilling—and she either won't or can't."

"Oh, I can give you change," said Jane, fumbling in her little bag.

"You see!" I said to Gladys. "I told you so."

I don't know why, but this talk left me horribly depressed. My beloved is so obdurate: and all the time Chris seems to me like a little figure walking away briskly from us all, on the road that goes over the hill. He doesn't look

round; he just grows less and less, and we stand wrangling here.

They gave me tea and we lingered talking, until they asked me if I would stay for dinner. Then I fled and went home. I am getting very sick of my solitary rooms.

(51)

[Charters.]

It is a long time since I wrote in this book. I have been ill—very ill indeed. After a long period of sloppy irritability, during which time I contrived to alienate the affections of my colleagues at the office, with the morbid intention of retaining their respect (and depend upon it, that's very nearly the worst mistake a man can make—it is better to be pitied than to be dreaded!)—I developed *pains*—I spare to particularise the gross details. Some otiose part (so they say) of my inner machinery was removed; and then what was I to do? My poor brother Herbert in Huddersfield has to work like a black, to keep his inefficient wife and three intolerable children in moderate comfort. He made signals, bless him; he came to see me; but he couldn't get away and I couldn't go to Huddersfield—so I went at last, rather against my better judgment, to a convalescent home. How little, after all, people know about illness! The place was admirably managed; the doctor both kind and amusing. The matron

resembled the Empress Eugénie in her indiscreet charm and finished manners; my nurse was fit to join the choir invisible—a woman of patience, resource, infinite good-humour, and innocence of mind. The food and arrangements were beyond praise. At first I was in a state of utter exhaustion, and then the absence of all responsibility and need of initiative were heavenly. But then my unfortunate mind awoke—the worst and prickliest part of it. I couldn't read, I couldn't write, I couldn't talk; and the busy architect within provided me with dungeon after dungeon of morbidity, where I crawled about or lay helpless day after day. I didn't know it was *possible* for the imagination, working in concert with the logical faculties, to elaborate such tortures. It seemed to me that I was disabled for life, and yet it was equally clear that I shouldn't die; and I constructed for myself scenes and dramas which, if I could but write them down, would place me in the front rank of contemporary realists. Finally I was converted to a practical belief in hell—that was where it seemed I had got to.

At last I managed to get up and crawl downstairs. I sate for hours in a pretty verandah, screened from wind and sun, looking out to sea; and there I made acquaintance with some other unfortunates, and one real friend; but I had

a sickly loathing for life by this time, and whatever I tried to talk about became suddenly either meaningless or horrible to me. I became saintly, gentle, mild, incapable of emotion. Some of the old lot came down to see me, and I can't tell you to what desperate expedients I resorted to keep them away. Jane was indefatigable—she brought fruit, flowers, books, even Gladys; and I'm not sure that wasn't the worst moment of all, to sit sipping lemonade and bolting pills, with tepid news being poured into my heedless ear, and poor Gladys trying fly after fly to see if she could tempt my sullen mind into the open. So it went on; my fellow-sufferers got brisker, did more, bustled up to me at last in full toilette, on their way back to life; while after fond adieus, I returned to my demon patience and my detective stories. My one friend recovered and vanished. Herbert came loyally at intervals, and sate, the picture of resourcelessness and dreary compassion. He had been interviewing my partners, he said, but —he stopped and gazed ruefully at me.

"But what?" I said.

"They are beginning to wonder when you will be fit to get back to work."

"Tell them I'm becoming first-rate at demon patience," I said, "it's very strengthening to the brain."

"Couldn't you make an effort, Jack? I don't want to bother you, of course, but couldn't you do a little more?"

"More? certainly not," I said. "Really four games of patience running would be too great a strain on the mind. I must be content with three."

"But it's getting rather serious."

"Good heavens, you need not rub *that* in! Do you suppose I stay here to *amuse* myself?"

Poor Herbert stared drearily at the sea. Then with a faint conciliatory smile—"It's awfully bad luck on you, Jack."

Then he would limp off, looking tired to death, with his bag bursting with papers.

I knew it was pathetic; I knew he would do anything to help me; but I couldn't even thank him decently for dragging himself half across England to comfort his smart brother who had come such an unexpected cropper. I knew what a beast I was. But there was nothing to be said and nothing to be done.

Then, one morning—the doctor had been with me, had told me I was twice the man I had been, that I was a patient to be proud of, and that I should find the rest had done me a lot of good. . . .

"Mr. Gascoyne to see you, sir."

I was just embarking on my first game of

patience, and there was a new story called *The Severed Thumb* on my table, and I had made my plans for the day.

Who should appear but Chris, strolling down the verandah with my nurse.

"Well, Jack, how goes it?"

"It doesn't go at all!"

"Oh, you'll get it all back, old man—you're looking better than I had expected."

"He's not as bad as he feels," said Sister Ada. "Mind, I'm not blaming him—it's all just a part of the illness."

Chris sate down beside me, and in ten minutes I was embarked upon my story. He said very little—he nodded at intervals.

"I didn't realise all this, Jack? Why didn't you write? I would have run down long ago."

"Oh, I felt I was doing all the running down that was needed."

"Are you getting any good here, do you think?"

"No, Chris, I'm going completely to seed."

"Why don't you try a change?"

"'Cœlum, non animum,'" I said.

"Jack, you mustn't be ruled by proverbs—that's superstition!"

"Yes, I have fallen very low. I submit to phrases—everything that happens is an omen. Do you remember the 'Affliction of Margaret'?

"'My apprehensions come in crowds;
I dread the rustling of the grass;
The very shadows of the clouds
Have power to shake me as they pass.'"

"You can quote, I see, old boy!"

"That's not much good, Chris."

"Well, we shall see! I'm going to have a talk to the doctor; a good fellow, isn't he? And then I'm going to dine with you—no, I know you don't want me, but you must just put up with me."

He went off smiling—half an hour later, a little table was spread for us in the verandah—the first meal I had eaten in company for three months. Chris was very gay and serene. He told me long stories of unemphatic incidents, with an abundance of detail. I laughed in spite of myself. When he rose to go, he said, "Now look here, old man; after breakfast, I shall appear at the door in a car; and you are coming with me. I have arranged it all. The good Sister Ada goes with us. In four or five hours we shall be at Charters."

"I couldn't do it," I said. "It's awfully good of you, Chris, but the very idea makes me feel faint. I shall be sick all the time to begin with!"

"All right," said Chris; "Sister Ada can deal with that; she won't mind."

"And when I get there, wherever it is, I shall die."

"If you must die, you had better die at Charters."

"I shall wire to my brother and my lawyer," I said; "I don't mean to go: it's an abduction!"

"I'll wire to the inspector of police to meet us at Charters," said Chris, "and you can give me into custody."

As soon as I was in bed Sister Ada appeared, full of glee. She dearly loved an adventure. She asked me what suit I would travel in.

"I'm not going to travel, Sister. I think it is very cruel, just when I'm beginning to get better."

Sister Ada shook her head, and began to pack my things.

"You'll look very well in your blue flannel suit," she said, "and you shall have a rose for your button-hole."

Five minutes later the doctor appeared. He said he was glad to hear I had made up my mind to go off—very sensible. "I like your friend Gascoyne, by the way, very much—he's got a way with him—I told him I had never seen anyone so cut out for a doctor."

"But I'm not going, doctor!"

The doctor pulled a long face. "I'm afraid I can't keep you!" he said. "Ten minutes after I had arranged it all with Mr. Gascoyne I had a wire asking for a room—and I accepted."

"Can't you get me a room in the village?" I said.

"No, I never take out-patients!"

"It's a conspiracy," I said, with an attempt at dignity, "an indictable offence!"

"Ah, you're too good-natured to ruin me!" said the doctor with an odious smile. "Besides, my dear fellow, you are quite well enough to go. I was trying to arrange it with your brother, when your friend turned up—it's providential, that's what it is! Now get a good night. Shall I come and help to shave you in the morning? you haven't made much of a job of it lately, you know!"

I slept and dreamed horribly. I woke again and again in a panic. The chinks in my curtains grew grey, and then golden. Then the birds began to sing. I hugged my despair.

Sister Ada brought my breakfast, in the highest spirits. Events succeeded each other with shocking rapidity. At 10.30, leaning on the doctor's arm with quite unnecessary heaviness, I tottered downstairs, Sister Ada carrying wraps and a net of oranges—disgraceful equipment! She and I were soon ensconced; the

doctor and matron shook hands and waved their handkerchiefs. Chris took his seat by the driver, and we drew slowly out of the shrubberies. That was a week ago; and here I am.

(52)

[Charters.]

It is a fortnight since my inglorious flight. Yesterday the good Sister Ada left us. I have recovered with incredible rapidity. Chris won't allow me any indulgences. I make my appearance at breakfast, and live an ordinary life, just avoiding fatigue.

I find that Chris was in communication with the doctor some time before he actually appeared. "I have a theory about such illnesses," he said to me. "I think these rest-cures are very good for a short time, and should be as complete as possible. The danger is that the mind gets a habit of being ill, and efforts seem impossible. As soon as bodily health is restored, I think people ought to return to ordinary life as soon as they can. What I object to most of all is visits from sympathetic friends. The vain and lazy part of one gets an infernal satisfaction in being the centre of attention and compassion, and arranges its sensations in accordance with that. I believe, in fact, old boy,

that illness is to a large extent what is often known as sin, and *vice versa*. Injured vanity, the sense of being overlooked and unappreciated is responsible for a lot of chronic illness. The invalid gets a sense of importance, which in its turn sometimes prolongs life. I have an old friend who would have died long ago if he had not been so ill!"

"But one isn't conscious of anything of the kind," said I. "I see now I was really malingering, though I thought I hated being ill!"

"Is any sinner ever really aware of being sinful?" said Chris. "A sinner as a rule either doesn't think about it at all, or he feels his temperament to be an excuse, or he has no sense of moral beauty, or his sense of moral seemliness is deficient on certain points—blind spots on the moral retina! But we all have them, though we can't recognise that it is so. In fact, we have very little right, most of us, to disapprove of one another."

"Yes," I said, "but one doesn't want to do away with moral indignation—there's no reason why we should not be disgusted with the evils we do see, because our perception is not complete."

"I don't know," said Chris. "Now I'm not combative—perhaps I'm a moral coward—but I don't see that one effects much by indignation

and animus. I hate strife and anger, and I would make almost any concessions to avoid them. You may gain your point for the time being by making people afraid to risk annoying you—but you don't get any further that way! I used to think it was vapid and sentimental advice to say—'little children, love one another'; and it certainly might be more suggestively and emphatically phrased. But if you can get a certain degree of mutual understanding and liking into any circle, if you can go out of your way to recognise and admire and even sometimes praise people's good points, you have a much better chance of being attended to if you have to object to their bad points. I don't much believe in fierceness and decisiveness, in sarcasm and censure. I have never seen much good come of them, and I have seen them do a lot of harm. Foolish guilelessness, helpless incapacity to believe ill of other people, fatuous confidence—those are the things which go very straight to people's hearts and remain there. What do you think?"

"Well, I'm made the other way, Chris," I said, "but I'm well aware that my way of doing things isn't very lasting—and I think your methods are better all along the line. No one forgets you; very few people would remember me!"

"Jack, old man, if you talk like that you will have to have breakfast in bed! I don't think I have ever known you bite, while your bark is decidedly refreshing!"

That was the end of our talk for that time!

(53)

[Charters.]

I had such a surprise yesterday! I'm rather dizzy about it still. I was sitting in the study, when there came a tap at the door. "May I come in?" said Chris's voice, "Helen wants to see the poor invalid. She is bent on doing good this morning—'Charity and mercy'—not unholy names I trust!"

I rose to my feet. Chris walked in, and with him one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen, her hand in his arm. It was Helen, no doubt, but it was Helen transfigured. How can I describe her? She was dressed in some blue striped stuff with a loose rough jacket, and strong little walking shoes. She had lost her look of fragility. Her hair escaped in delightful brown curls from a rough cap, but her delicate eyebrows, her wide-open hazel eyes, her smiling lips just parted, and showing little white teeth, her soft and warm cheek, all had a look of perfect health, almost boyish in character. She dropped Chris's arm, and walked up to me shyly but unshrinkingly, fixed her eyes upon me, as if

scanning me curiously—I can't tell you what an effect she produced on me—a strange mixture of shame and delight—shame at my sense of bulky feebleness, and sheer delight at the sight of anything so entirely radiant and marvellous. "I didn't intend to disturb you," she said. "I just *asked* about you, and Uncle Chris made me come—he simply dragged me to the door—didn't you hear my cries for help?"

"Helen is very helpless," said Chris, watching her with amusement; "she has no initiative, no *savoir faire*—only general benevolence!"

"Don't listen to him," said Helen; "of course I *wanted* to see you—and Chris made me come in."

"He's very fond of hauling people about just now," I said. "He pushed me into a carriage, like a sack, by main force, and shot me out here—I've not got my breath back yet!"

"*Are* you ill?" said Helen. "I don't think you look very bad. Uncle Chris wanted me to believe you were groaning in a chair, with medicine bottles on the table—he said I mustn't speak above a whisper!"

"Anyhow," said Chris, "I have let Helen off her lessons to-day—unless you would like to hear her repeat 'Father William' and 'All things bright and beautiful.' She says them very nicely! In any case you have got to

amuse each other till lunch-time. Take him out to the garden, Helen; let him lean on you; 'Of an unhappy man the unhappy prop,' you know! I have to go to the village!" And Chris disappeared.

"What shall we do?" said Helen, evidently excited by her responsibilities. "Would you like to go to the garden? Or shall we stay here?"

We went to the garden, and sate down on the oak settle. "Oh, I suppose you want cushions?" said Helen—and before I could stop her, she had fetched cushions out of the house and settled me. "You must have *everything*," said Helen. "It would be awful, if after I went away, you said to Uncle Chris—'Of course I was very uncomfortable—that tiresome girl never thought of anything!' Don't you think this seat is just right—you know Uncle Chris's plan? Get an ordinary seat, cut four inches off the front legs and eight off the hind legs—then it's low enough and nicely tilted. The first seat he ordered, the man did just the opposite, so if you sate down you fell face downwards on the grass." There was a moment's silence, and Helen went on: "Do you have any plan about talking, when you haven't anything particular to say?" she inquired. "Uncle Chris says that you must say something, whether you

like it or not—it's the only way to learn to talk. I said to him, ' But it isn't the *talking* that's the difficulty—it's the thinking ! ' Then he said, ' Oh, take the letters of the alphabet in turn ! ' But the first time I tried it was with old Mrs. Merridew. I thought of algebra, and then blacking, and then Cordova, and so on—and then I saw the clock racing on, and old Mrs. Merridew said, ' I'm afraid, miss, you'll have something on your mind.' "

I could go on indefinitely scribbling down this charming child's talk. It wasn't continuous, but the silences were not awkward. One particular thing she said I must put down. We were looking at the spring, and she said, " I have had a fancy about the spring ever since I was a little girl—as if something crept along it out of the hill, and came into this house, for anyone who knew how to expect it. I used to think that was perhaps what made Uncle Chris so different from anyone else—isn't he different, don't you think ? "

" Yes, Helen, he's very different."

" And much nicer ? "

" Yes, he's much nicer."

" But there's something in him you don't easily get past," said Helen. " It's like running up against a looking-glass—it *looks* like the room you are in, but there's no door that way."

"What do you mean exactly, Helen?"

"I don't quite know—but it's there; perhaps *you* have a back way in?"

Otherwise Helen's talk was mostly of ordinary events, except that some special way of pronouncing certain words, an emphasis on certain tones and syllables, gave a curious and novel charm to her words—and I was able too to tell her two or three stories which amused her—in fact, under a rather serious air, as first seen, she concealed an unusual delight in amusing things—and her silvery echoing laughter was in itself a delight. The minutes flew by very fast, and I was distinctly annoyed when Chris returned to lunch. The child stayed to lunch, and waited on us; but I was amused to hear a dialogue which took place on the unexpected entrance of old Reddaway. Helen was just taking up a dish from the sideboard, when Reddaway said to her in a low tone, "Now then, Miss Helen, give that up to me, and sit you down—it's not for you to wait on these gentlemen." "Why not, Father Reddaway, if I like it?" said Helen, yielding up her burden without further protest.

After luncheon, she bicycled away. "Now mind, Helen," said Chris with uplifted forefinger, "you are going to come down every morning at twelve o'clock to nurse poor Mr.

Trevor, until you get notice to quit." "Of course," said Helen, adding, "I was rather *nervous* about it all this morning—wasn't I? But I shan't be again," and off she went.

"Well, I must say, Chris," said I, subsiding into a chair, "you choose your houris well! I never saw a more enchanting vision!"

"Isn't she delightful?" said Chris. "If only she could stay like this for ever—and isn't it incredible that she is that poor creature's daughter?"

"How old is she?" I said.

"That's just it," said Chris, "she is sixteen—nearly seventeen. And she's a clever child, too—she reads most things—she sees the point—she has an excellent memory. We shall have to consider what is to be done with her. The worst of it is that some of the young men about are beginning to take notice. However, she's quite content at present with her mother and myself—and she is simply the best company in the world: she's full of life and spirit—but I mustn't go on about Helen. The only marvel to me is how the Power which created her could ever create anything ugly or wicked or absurd!"

"Do you see much of Mrs. B.?" I said.

"No," said Chris, "not nearly as much as I should like; she's a little mysterious to me:

but the lonely hermit of the Cotswolds has to be discreet!"

I am decidedly puzzled. The only clear thing is that Chris is extraordinarily well and lively. He is writing something, but I don't know what. And he is inclined to be philanthropic. There are mysterious classes of sheepish farm-boys twice a week. They carve things; and on Sunday there's a sort of Nature-study affair. Chris isn't communicative. He thinks it would bore me, and I suspect he is not far wrong.

(54)

[Charters.]

The delicious Helen comes every day. When I compare her with what I, as a boy, was like at her age, I am fairly staggered. She seems to be interested in everything—she turned up the money page of the *Times* the other day—Chris had suggested this—and made me explain it to her. Heavens, what a stockbroker the girl would make! She is as sharp as a needle—she picks up things like contango and backwardation in a second. Indeed I am surprised to find what a simple subject finance is, and how limited its mysteries are. It has all had an unexpected effect on me—I wrote to the office that they could send me down some business to do—this was entirely to amuse Helen—and now that I have begun, I want to go on. Fancy my being restored to financial pursuits by the curiosity of a girl of sixteen!

I feel as though I had known her all my life: she treats me as an old uncle, but her innocent familiarities—which Chris regards no more than a sheep regards a starling strolling on its back

—are rather perilous to me. I have the makings of a very silly old man within me; and a firm, cool young hand arresting mine on the paper, and a flying curl that touches my cheek as we bend over our studies have power to stir my philosophic calm.

However! The important thing is that I know the precise limit of my own charms, and have no illusions on that point.

But I am plunged in mysteries! Yesterday Mrs. Bevir joined us at luncheon; and there was something inflammable about the whole affair which rather frightened me. Mrs. Bevir, I have now no doubt, is a very explosive woman, with extremely strong self-control. But yesterday after luncheon, when Chris was studying a map, and Helen stood by him, put one arm round his neck, and began pointing out things with the other, Mrs. B. looked at her with something that seemed to me almost like hatred. And poor old Chris was so utterly unconscious. He got up to get another map, and disengaged himself from Helen's arm as he might have done from an enlacing creeper—not roughly but carelessly.

Chris and Helen went off for a walk, and Mrs. Bevir took me off in her car.

It was a strange conversation.

"Do you remember our talk," said Mrs.

Bevir suddenly, "about Mr. Gascoyne, the last time you were here?"

"Yes," I said, "very well indeed!"

"Well, what does he mean to do? The more I know of him, the more I feel his power in so many directions. Surely dawdling about in the country, in a little old house, however pleasant, reading and writing and talking, is not a life for him? I'm not ungrateful. He does a lot in the place—he has drilled the young louts of the parish into a nice, well-mannered set of boys, with all sorts of interests. All kinds of little disputes are brought to him, and he settles them—I could tell you some very curious stories! He has made Helen into a really delightful girl (at least I think so), full of interests and quite unaffected; everybody feels his influence. But I can't help thinking he is wasted—he might be anything and anybody. What do you really feel about it, Mr. Trevor?"

"I think he is very happy," I said, "and I don't know many people better employed. But you see, I am particularly grateful to him just now. He came and swept me off when I was on the point of coming to grief, like Perseus and Andromeda. He disentangled me from the serpent hypochondria—so perhaps I am not the best judge just now!"

"That's just it," said Mrs. Bevir: "he

rescues us all—but he can't rescue himself. May I tell you," she went on, "about a talk I had with him a few weeks ago? He was talking to me about Helen's future—and I rather lost my temper, I don't quite know why. Probably I was vexed at his being so much more interested in Helen than in me"—she gave me a baffled sort of smile. "I said something to him on the lines of what I have been saying to you. I said that with all his powers, he ought to be doing a bigger work than being a kind of amateur parson in the Cotswolds! He wasn't in the least vexed. He smiled and said it was the sort of life for which he was fitted—he hadn't the grasp or the intelligence for *big* work. He said he was grateful to me for the compliment—but he thought that people were too romantic, and imagined that everyone ought to aim at being a hero and a pioneer. He said there wasn't room for many leaders, and that he had no gift of leadership—he was only rather a good scavenger. He could tidy up things a little. Then he said to me, 'Isn't it enough to be entirely happy in leading a life which is well within one's powers and doing it as well as one can?' What could I say?"

"What *did* you say?" I inquired.

"I told him he was too humble-minded."

"I don't think that is true. I don't regard

Chris as a humble man—he is very keenly alive to other people's deficiencies. There aren't many people he admires."

"Why should there be?" said Mrs. Bevir helplessly; and then gave me a deprecating look.

"No," I said. "I don't think Chris is very robust. He has few ambitions, he isn't combative. I think that under a strain he would lose much of his power. He can't throw things aside. I think myself that his behaviour is the unconscious guarding of a not very strong will, and a certain deficiency of moral courage. And, what very few people can do, he really recognises his limitations."

"But he does the most unpleasant things," said Mrs. Bevir, "without turning a hair. I shouldn't dare to do them, and I don't think I am timid."

"But Chris knows exactly how timid he is," I said, "and his strength is that he doesn't really care *for* other people, only *about* them. He has no sense of possession."

"No," said Mrs. Bevir, with a strained gaze, "one never feels that one has anything to give him."

"He wants no one," I said.

"I am going to be very bold," said Mrs. Bevir. "I know I can trust you. Helen is

growing up rapidly. She is absolutely devoted to Chris. What would happen if she fell in love with him ? "

" She won't," I said. " Look at them together. She might be his daughter or his sister ; but did you ever see anything more entirely unlike lovers ? "

" That is true," said Mrs. Bevir, with an air of relief. " But here we are all of us quarrelling about him—' We all love Chris ! ' "

" If that is a quotation," I said severely, " the name in the original is Jack—and I would point out that it is *my* name."

Mrs. Bevir laughed. " Oh, we take you on trust—aren't you his best friend ? "

We were silent for a little—and then she said : " Wasn't there a girl you told me about—Miss Holmes, was it ? What about her ? "

" Oh, she has given Chris up," I said. " We all have to do that in the end. Chris can't be captured. He must do things in his own way."

" Yes, I am afraid he must."

We sate silent after that ; and then I became aware that I was with a very unhappy woman. Something, I believe, passed direct from her mind into my own—the desire of the moth for the star—and one of my old unreasoning rages against Chris stirred in my mind. What right had he to be so disengaged, and yet to bring

suffering to so many? The thing seemed quite insoluble.

We were close to Charters. I looked round at Mrs. Bevir, and I think she had been crying. But she was a woman of spirit. "To think," she said, "that we have been out so long, and I have never once given you an opportunity of telling me about your symptoms! Are you really better?"

"I believe I am perfectly well," I said, "and I must soon go back to work. Chris has cured me—Chris and Helen!"

"I am glad to have had this talk with you," she said quietly, as we drew up at the gate. "I think you understand."

"Oh, yes, I understand!"

(55)

[CHARTERS.]

I HAVE been a month at Charters, and yesterday I told Chris that my cure was complete, and that I was arranging to return to work. I said something about my owing my recovery to him. "Oh, nonsense!" he said, "no one ever *cures* these things like that—the point is to find the right impulse at the right moment. We are all thaumaturgists at heart, and it is as absurd to attribute your recovery to me as to be grateful to the guard of a train for blowing his whistle. Now I think *Helen* deserves some credit, not so much for being what she is, a sort of Evelyn Hope:

> . . . "What, your soul was pure and true;
> The good stars met in your horoscope,
> Made you of spirit, fire, and dew"—

I always think of her like that! But it is her willingness to be of use, her power of caring for other people and wanting, more than any-

thing else in the world, to *help*. That has done so much for you. A beautiful thing, isn't it? So much more beautiful than the soul of a boy!"

"Well, I distribute thanks quite impartially," said I, "like that man in *Happy Thoughts*. But seriously, Chris—I *will* be serious for once—if you hadn't been at hand, I should have lost my livelihood, my work, my interest in life, my graceful manners, and even my good looks—is that nothing? *Me mihi reddis!*"

"I don't think so," said Chris. "You might have gone down a little deeper, and it might have been more of a wrench; but you were climbing up out of the pit—and don't let us talk of it any more! Before you go—you can help me in this—I want to get Jane and Gladys down for a night or two, and try to fill up *that* trench, at all events."

"You'll let them see Helen and Mrs. Bevir?" I said.

"No, I think not—it isn't going to be a party, just the opening of a sluice—we shall manage better by ourselves."

"You are a wonderful person for keeping your friends in separate compartments," I said. "It's a kind of bureau—I don't suppose anyone

in the world knows so many people who don't know each other."

"*Divide et impera*," said Chris. "I don't do it on purpose—I simply don't like mixtures. They only complicate things, and my one object in life is to simplify them."

"Oh yes, Chris, you make things wonderfully simple for us all!"

"Not at first sight, I admit," said Chris; "but things that are worth having are bound to be complicated."

The only other thing I asked was that he would go with me to Scantling. Helen had said she wanted to take me all round, and show me all her "rabbit-runs and bolt-holes."

"Hadn't you better go alone?" said Chris. "I don't seem to hit it off with Madam nowadays. I make her absent-minded, and then I become self-conscious."

"Perhaps, like Mrs. Gummidge, she is thinking of the old 'un."

"I hope to Heaven not," said Chris.

"Well, you must come with me and simplify her a little."

The next day Helen said to me, "Uncle Chris says I mustn't come to-morrow, because you have got company and are busy. I wish he

wasn't so mysterious! I would like to see his old friends, particularly Miss Holmes! The more nice people you can know, the better. Should I like her?"

"Yes, very much."

"What does she *do* exactly?"

"You are always wanting to know that, Helen. Haven't you found out that everybody does the same things in London?"

"Yes, that was why Uncle Chris came away."

"Do you feel dull here, Helen?"

"Dull? No, indeed—I never can find time to do half the things I mean to. But Uncle Chris says that you have been too exciting, and that we must get back to our work."

"He's a martinet, isn't he? He makes us all do whatever he wishes."

"Except mother," said Helen. "I sometimes think she is the strongest of us all."

"I shall be sorry to go away and leave you, Helen."

"Yes, I think you will care a little bit—just a little twinge sometimes; but though I don't want you to have a twinge, I should hate it if I thought you wouldn't—how do you explain that?"

"It's just the interest you pay on a satisfactory loan."

"Oh, I'm sure it isn't as dull as that!"

I could go on scribbling for ever about this enchanting creature. But I must stop now; I soon get tired.

(56)

[Charters.]

Jane and Gladys have been and gone—it was much easier than I had feared; and for once in my life, the results outstripped my wildest hopes.

Jane was in great form. She had conceived her part to be that of the faithful but slightly neglected friend, too noble to feel personally aggrieved, and full of motherly sympathy; she was dressed for the part with a kind of dowdy richness, and walked with a crutch-stick. Gladys was trim and lively, as if she had made up her mind to be sensible, and to obliterate forlorn impressions. My old ardours revived rapidly. I had awaited their coming with rather a hang-dog feeling, ashamed of my surrender to illness, and ashamed of being ashamed. I don't mean that I am faithless to Helen—she is adorable—but the *ingénue* isn't *quite* congenial to me. I have to keep the door of my lips, and abandon my cynic rôle. Helen takes my ironies *au sérieux*, and I have to explain I don't mean them. But Gladys has been sick and sorry

herself, has seen through devilries, and has learnt not to trust everybody. Helen revives my aspirations, but Gladys consoles me for the loss of ideals. I feel I may injure the bloom of Helen's mind, but with Gladys I need have no pretences; and my heart leapt up to find her more glad to see me than she has ever been before.

"I am afraid you have been very ill, Jack," said Jane, regarding me through her pince-nez when we were all settled at tea, "these maladies that get inside one's defences are a sore trial."

"Yes, a great trial of faith!" said I. "But suffering matters little—one wins experience by it!"

Jane stared at me feelingly, but a little doubtfully. "He isn't laughing at an old woman, is he?" she said mournfully.

"Suffering seems to suit you," said Gladys. "I never saw you look so well!"

I quoted Mrs. Browning:

> "'"I wear a smiling face," she said;
> I have a smile for all I meet."'

But Chris knows the dark background, and the long tearful days."

"Such days can be very restful," said Jane.

"Come, don't let us behave as if we were

attending a funeral," said Gladys. "You both seem iniquitously cheerful and comfortable down here!"

"How are all the elect?" I said.

"Ah!" said Jane, "our work has all gone to pieces. I feel like a charwoman, going out to work every day. But I blame no one!"

"That's very noble," I said. "How is Northover, dear fellow?"

"I really think he is rather decent," said Gladys. "He doesn't whet his tusks in public."

"And Lady N.?" I said.

"She is a kill-joy," said Jane. "I wish it to be understood that I despair of her."

"But what do you all *do*?" I said.

"I don't know," said Jane. "Men work and women weep, I suppose."

"It's dull," said Gladys, "decidedly dull. We seem to have all found out that we ought to have jobs of our own, but we can't break the habit of frivolity."

"Books and art and healthful play, I suppose?" said I.

"It's like the bits of a broken vase," said Gladys. "We spend our time in trying to fit them together. Chris broke it, and Jack trampled on the pieces!"

"But what am *I* to do when I come back?" I said. "I had counted on my share of artistic

impressions, and our jolly little ethical discussions."

"Oh, it is all too sickening," said Gladys. "It seems all to have been a sham from beginning to end. Did we ever care about *anything* real? Yes, Chris, I make an exception in your favour. You did; and you did your best to make us—but for us, it was all dressing up in borrowed plumes!"

"So that's the funeral oration over our little movement?" I said.

Chris had been sitting silent, looking from speaker to speaker with the utmost good-humour.

"Chris," I said, "you are intensely aggravating. Can't you do something, even if it is only to paw the air? Don't sit there like a Sunday-school teacher with a fractious class!"

"My dear Jack," said Chris, "what do you want me to say?"

"You might at least pronounce a blessing!"

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," said Gladys.

"Ah, no," said Chris, "that won't do—the things were right enough. What was wrong was our sympathetic pretence of caring. I'm to blame for that."

"We didn't want to disappoint you, Chris," said Jane.

"But what right had I either to be disap-

pointed, or not to be disappointed?" said Chris. "Hadn't we better just leave it alone. Repentance is the one unforgivable sin. Be ashamed, have done with it, pick it up with the tongs, and throw it into the fire. What are fires for?"

"I'm not going to be deprived of my penitence," said Jane. "It's my only luxury left!"

"As long as it is clearly understood to be a luxury, you may indulge it, dear Jane," said Chris.

"Come," I said, "we can't go on like this. We have had the sentence—now let's have the verdict!"

Gladys stooped to the floor, hollowed her hands as though she were picking up a heap of dead leaves, rose, walked to the fireplace, and made as though she was casting her burden in.

"That's the end of it all," she said.

"Amen," I said. "Now let's make plans."

That's the end of the *movement*, I think. But I'm not ungrateful. I have had a great deal of fun out of it; and the best things I have left all come from it.

Chris took Jane off for a little stroll. Gladys and I sate on. "Now may I say something?" I said at last. "I seem to have heard your voice already uplifted in our argument?" said

Gladys. It was a gallant attempt, but she would not look me in the face. "Look at me!" I said. "Those were only general remarks—this is something particular!" "Don't despise me, Jack!" she said, and put her hand in mine.

So now you know, old boy! It was all quite easy after that.

(57)

[Charters.]

Jane and Gladys went off yesterday. I told dear old Jane about it all myself, and got more than a blessing from that affectionate and generous old practitioner. With spinsters of the acid sort, the result of age is to make them regard the harmless male as a sort of Minotaur, a ruthless destroyer of innocence and virtue—they shiver with hostility, like Mr. F.'s aunt, at the thought of all they have escaped—but dear old Jane, who has never made any pretence whatever that she would not have liked a man of her own—and she would have made an extraordinarily good and loyal wife, more's the pity—takes the utmost delight in beckoning the heedless nymph into Bluebeard's den. In this case, there is the added pleasure of believing (she confided all this to me when Gladys, overcome with a sudden overpowering modesty, vanished from the room) that she had herself, unassisted, both organised, managed, and effected the match. "You must give me a *little* credit, dear Jack," she said with affected diffidence.

"Why," I said, "it is, of course, wholly and entirely your doing—such tact and discretion! Whatever people may say, *this* marriage certainly was not made in Heaven—I don't suppose Heaven has had any idea it was even contemplated."

Jane bridled with delight. "That's a little profane, isn't it, Jack?—but there's *something* in it—no *direct* influence, of course; Gladys would have seen through that—and it's not my way, either!"

"No, indeed," I said, "you are as secret as a grain of mustard seed."

"Well, Jack, if I did just head her delicately off everyone but you, if I just peppered the other young men's minds with a little caution, you won't blame me. Gladys is a dear girl, and adds up well, as Chris used to say, but you won't mind my saying now that she is very critical, and I just worked upon that, both with her and them—it's wonderful what you can do with a *hint*."

"Wonderful what *you* can do," I said.

"Ah, well," said Jane, "I always thought that you two were made for each other—all I did was just to accommodate things a bit."

"Jane, you're wonderful! And now what are you going to do about Chris?"

"Ah, he is too great a problem—you know I felt from the first that he and Gladys were misfits—they always just irritated each other. I was very stern about that."

"Oh no, you were like a mother to both of them."

"That was my ideal, Jack. How clever of you to see it."

"And I shall always regard you as my mother-in-law! You shall be our granny—a very youthful one! Just inside the prohibited degrees!"

When they went off, I said to Gladys, rather frigidly, "I'm afraid, Miss Holmes, that we are hardly likely to meet again in town, now that Lady Jane has dissolved the assembly?"

"Oh, we mustn't *quite* lose sight of you!" said she. Chris who was standing by, looking on the whole a very much relieved man, glanced at me rather dubiously.

"Yes, this is one of your little simplifications!" I said.

However, in the evening, I told Chris the whole story. Chris was in his most princely mood. "Ah, old man," he said, "you needn't think I don't know how good you have been about this. You stood out of the way, and gave Gladys and me every chance."

"Yes, indeed," I said. "It's clearly understood that I am a *pis aller*. Gladys has consented to put up with the second best. She is more sensible than I had hoped."

"Jack, you don't do yourself justice. You are the most human of all of us, though you cover up your tracks very carefully."

"Yes, Chris, I have always been Tobit to your angel. But I'm so intolerably happy now, that I am going to be very frank—not for my pleasure, only for your good. Can't you really see your way to link yourself on to life, old man? It's slipping past, is life. You shepherded us all very diligently—you were never a hireling shepherd—but it was horribly impartial, the way you cared for us *all*. I used to long for you to have a preference! You must let me say this—I think you are the best man I know, the best man I have ever seen. You are the only person I know who comes near the Christian ideal of loving your enemies as much as your friends, or, at all events, of behaving as if you loved them—how you do it, I don't know! It isn't a mere sense of duty—you *care* for everyone, but you don't *need* anyone. I'm not even sure that you need the beloved Helen—but Chris, you mustn't break *her* heart—you have gone about breaking hearts, you know, not from the highest motives at all, but because

you couldn't ever give anybody the one thing they wanted. But you have got to do something about Helen. It has never occurred to her to fall in love with you; but her heart may suddenly awake. You can't go on, Chris, in this ethereal way. The life here has glorified you too much—'sublimated' you, in the new jargon. It's a crime to be so disinterested." All this soliloquy I had uttered—I was feeling decidedly uncomfortable—as if I was addressing an audience outside the window, jerking it over my shoulder at Chris—it wasn't gracefully done; it was like a photograph of a bad film.

But at this point I looked round, and Chris was staring at me in a sort of horror.

"Chris," I said, "you will have to forgive me, but I can't unsay it. My own great happiness has opened my lips—or perhaps winged the arrow, for I have often tried to say this to you before."

"Do you really and truly feel all that?" said Chris in a very tragic voice. "It isn't—well, it isn't pleasant to see oneself reflected in a friend's mind as a sort of monster. I thought I was harmless enough, and perhaps even useful in some degree. Yet I have never made love to anyone—never said a word I didn't feel."

"Yes, that's the deadliest part of the charm," I said. "You roused the predatory instinct—you have been like the white bird in the story, which no bird-catcher can approach."

Chris rose from his chair and began walking up and down. "I see what you mean—partly, at all events—I have arranged everything to suit myself; and thought because I was at best so sterile a creature, that everyone else was so—or could be if they chose."

"That's all very unfair and morbid, Chris," I said. "You have a perfect right to do as you like—but I think you have come to the parting of the ways. These moonlit solitary raptures won't do, old man. You have been behaving like Endymion on Latmos, and the goddess herself has drawn near while you slept."

"Give me a moment to think," said Chris.

After a few minutes, in which the cold voice of the stream made itself mockingly heard from without, poor Chris turned a haggard eye upon me. "You have got me down at last, Jack," he said. "I'm unhorsed—and I will tell you something that I never meant to say. I do love Helen more than I have ever loved a human creature—but you mustn't mistake me, Jack. She's like a child of my own. To be her lover—I'll speak plainly—would be an atrocious, an

abominable thing. But I shall do what I have dimly meditated: you have brought it to a point. I shall go to Mrs. Bevir, who has been endlessly good to me and to whom I am greatly attached, and see if she will take pity on me. The difficulty is that there always seems a barrier between us."

"Good God, Chris," I said, moved to sudden anger. "*You* are the barrier—you and your solitary dignity. Mrs. Bevir is eating her heart out for you—where are your eyes?—if she had not been so self-controlled a woman, she would have been fiercely and miserably jealous of Helen. You don't know what she has been suffering."

"Do *you*?" said Chris with a sudden sternness.

"Yes, of course," I said. "Remember that I have been hopelessly and helplessly in love all this time, and that gives one eyes. You don't know what storms have been raging all round you—blood and fire and vapour of smoke! and you sit listening to your spring and jocundly driving your team afield!"

Chris looked at me mutely and shook his head.

"It's a ghastly place, the poor world," he said.

"No," I said, "for once in my life the irrepressible humorist, as I have regarded Providence

hitherto, has revealed himself, like Mr. Boffin, as the patient philanthropist!"

That was one of the toughest talks I have ever had. No wonder that we had a silent and civil evening.

It was rather a melancholy time, for all that—though I must admit that I find it hard just now to be even decorously melancholy with this private vintage of my own to sip; Chris was preoccupied and distrait (and no wonder) and overt sympathy is not my strongest point. I went off to bed early, and to sleep. At some dead hour of the night I awoke suddenly, thinking I had heard someone cry out my name; but all was silent, and I was beginning to compose myself again to sleep, when I heard the sound of muffled conversation, and a moment later soft but hurried movements and creakings in Chris's room, which adjoined my own.

I got up, went to Chris's room, and knocked softly at the door. Chris, half-dressed, opened it to me, and I saw that he had a light burning.

"Ah," he said, "I hoped we had not disturbed you. The fact is," he went on, "that Mrs. Bevir is ill—very seriously so—they got hold of the doctor, but Helen has bicycled down here, and says that Mrs. Bevir wants to see me.

I must go to her—I hope it will turn out better than Helen seems to fear." He was rapidly completing his toilet as he spoke, and begged me to go back to bed—he would soon return.

I went to my room, I heard Chris go downstairs softly and open the door; and a minute later I heard the click of the gate, and in the uncertain gloom saw the lights of two bicycle lamps thrown on the white road and the dark hedge, glide rapidly down the lane.

I went back to bed, but could not sleep. There seemed something ominous and menacing in the air, which confirmed and enforced what I had said to Chris on the previous evening. And then my mind was suddenly invaded by a darker terror. Mrs. Bevir had appeared to me, the last time I had seen her, a woman on the very edge of her endurance. . . . How strange it seemed to me that these deep emotions and affections, for the sake of which, I thought in my own new happiness, life itself existed and on which it was based, should yet bring with them such torture and dismay, when unshared and unrequited—and further that our social customs and habits should be so organised as to put every obstacle in the way of human beings, racked against their will and purpose by the onset of these emotions, to prevent them from frankly declaring and discussing them; so that

what most deeply concerns our happiness and unhappiness are yet the very things which can neither be uttered nor even hinted. What was the source, I wondered, of this strange suppression and confusion of forces?

The morning began at last to come softly in over the eastern ridge. The stars were extinguished, the gloom of the night lost its sullen solidity and became pale and translucent. I could bear my thoughts no longer, but rose and dressed, and went quietly out on to the road. The clouds took on a rusty stain, and presently it was as though a rosy glow, tangible as mist, filled the air, sweet with awakened breath and scented coolness. It seemed incomprehensible that in stale shuttered rooms, behind the quaint gables, there should be hidden pain and terror, when the world seemed so gay and kind outside.

Presently I saw Chris coming along, pale and haggard, on his bicycle. He waved his hand on seeing me, dismounted, and said to me: "Yes, she has been very ill—a heart attack—I will tell you all about it presently. She is a little better now and resting. I am to go up again a little later; but I don't think she can live—she does not even wish to live."

We went to the house, and to the garden; and sitting beside the spring, which to my fancy

seemed subdued to a dull and chiding tone, he told me what there was to tell.

"Helen told me," said Chris, "that after dinner last night her mother seemed sad and perplexed about something and disinclined to talk—and then had talked rather mysteriously about a journey she might be obliged to take. Helen had said something about accompanying her, and that she would like to travel—but her mother had said rather abruptly that she would be compelled to go alone—and then had proceeded to ask Helen where in that case she would like to go—to one of her aunts, or to her grandmother, or if I cared to take her in, perhaps to Charters; 'and of course I said,' Helen said, 'that I would far sooner be at Charters than anywhere else.' And then her mother had said that she thought it could be arranged, but that Helen must remember she had no claim on me. 'I said,' Helen went on, 'that I was sure you wouldn't mind—I was right, wasn't I?—but mother said that I mustn't be too sure. Then mother got up and said she was not feeling very well, and would go to bed, and rang for Peters, and kissed me. She seemed to find it difficult to go upstairs, and Peters helped her—and I went up too, but she said she only wanted a rest, and that we would have another talk in the morning. I went to bed then, but

an hour later Peters fetched me. Mother was sitting propped up in bed, with her head hanging down on her shoulder, and could not get her breath at all. We sent for the doctor, and then mother said she wanted to see you, to arrange something. I thought she was feverish and perhaps didn't mean it, when she smiled and said, " No, I'm not wandering—I do mean it. I want to see Uncle Chris, Helen—I'm very ill." '

" That was all Helen could tell me, but she added that she had thought her mother ill and unlike herself for the last few days, but that she would not be persuaded to see the doctor.

" Helen fetched me as you know," said Chris. " I went up to her room, and the doctor came out and told me that it was a heart attack—but that she was a little better, and as she seemed very anxious to consult me, I had better see her.

" She was sitting up in bed, her eyes closed, breathing very quickly. She opened her eyes and smiled and pointed to a chair, but could not speak. She made signs to the doctor—I think she desired some strong restorative—and something was given her. But she appeared no better, and the doctor said to me in a whisper that it was almost the last thing he could try

—there was a cylinder of oxygen on the table, which they had been using.

"All at once she revived, and indicated that she wished to be alone with me. I sate down beside her. 'I hope you don't mind my sending for you like this?' she said at last.

"'Why, of course not,' I said. 'What can I do?'

"'I thought I was going to die,' she said. 'I don't feel like that now—but there is something I have long meant to tell you and kept waiting and putting it off. It is simply this—if I were to die, would you—and you must tell me this truly without any reservation—would you take care of Helen? There is no one else for her to go to that I should care for her to go to.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I would. You won't die; but if Helen were left alone, there is nothing that would make me happier than to have her with me.'

"She looked at me with a curious look: 'There seems so little time,' she said, 'and I must speak.'

"But she was silent a long time.

"Then she said suddenly,

"'Would you think of making her your wife?'

"'No,' I said. 'Such a thought has never entered my mind.'

"A very strange look of happiness came over her face. 'Never?' she said—and then, 'How mistaken one can be!'

"Then, old man, I saw I must speak; and I said, 'I will tell you—it was only last night that I made up my mind to ask *you* to be my wife.'

"She gave a little soft cry. Then she frowned, more as if puzzled than displeased. 'For the sake of Helen?' she said. 'Yes,' I said, 'partly, but for your sake and my own as well.'

"She gave me another quick smile, and her eyes closed again. 'Ah, it is too late,' she said, 'but you make me very happy'; and she put her hand upon mine. I raised it to my lips—and then, Jack, a kind of mist cleared off my mind, and I saw it all. I saw that I had been walking in a vain shadow all my days, too well-satisfied with all my childish fancies to take life firmly in my arms, too timid to dare anything. And now I am to have at once my reward and my punishment. Oh, I have been blind."

He put his face in his hands for a moment.

I had no word of any kind to say—but an instant later I said, "But there is Helen."

"Yes," he said, "there is Helen!"

The words were scarcely out of his lips, when Helen stood before us—she had come softly

through the house, and crossed the lawn slowly to us, worn and tired. She came up to Chris, and standing before him said, "Mother is dead —she died soon after she sent you away—she sent you her love." Then she said suddenly, "Oh, what shall I do—you'll take me home, won't you, dear Uncle Chris? I want you most of all."

He rose and gathered her into his arms. "Helen, dearest," he said. It was not for me to stay.

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